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# *The* IDIOT *at* HOME



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BANGS

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**JOHN KENDRICK BANGS**

By  
John Kendrick Lewis

Illustrated by  
F. T. Leuchter



NEW YORK AND LONDON

1900



DR. J. K. BANOS

# The Idiot at Home

By

John Kendrick Bangs

Illustrated by

F. T. Richards



NEW YORK AND LONDON  
HARPER & BROTHERS *Publishers*  
1900

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TO  
"MISS BANGS OF LONDON"  
FROM  
"MR. BARNES OF NEW YORK"



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**“LET THE FATHERS LOOK AFTER THE CHILDREN  
AT NIGHT”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

before evening came that I had gone shopping and let my wife have the rest. As a matter of fact, the bringing up of children should be left to the mother—”

“Oh, but the father should have something to do with it,” interrupted Mrs. Idiot. “It is too great a responsibility to place on a woman’s shoulders.”

“You didn’t let me finish, my dear,” said the Idiot, amiably. “I was going to say that the mother should bring the children up, and the father should take ’em down when they get up too high.”

“My views to a dot,” said Mr. Pedagog, with more enthusiasm than he had ever yet shown over the Idiot’s dicta. “Just as in ordinary colonial government, the home authorities should govern, and when necessary a stronger power should intervene.”

“Ideal—is it not?” laughed Mrs. Idiot, addressing Mrs. Pedagog. “The mother, Spain. The children, Cuba. Papa, the great and glorious United States!”

“Ahem! Well,” said Mr. Pedagog, “I didn’t mean that exactly, you know—”

“But it’s what you said, John,” said Mrs. Pedagog, somewhat severely.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Well, I don't see why there can't be a division of responsibility," said the Poet, who had never married, and who knew children only as a theory. "Let the mothers look after them in the daytime, and the fathers at night."

This sally was greeted with an outburst of applause, it was so practical.

"Excuse me!" said the Idiot. "I'm not selfish, but I don't want to have charge of the children at night. Why, when Tommy was cutting his teeth I suffered agonies when night came on. I was down-town all day, and so wasn't very much bothered then, but at night it was something awful. Not only Tommy's tooth, but the fear that his mother would tread on a tack."

"That was unselfish," said Mr. Pedagog, dryly. "You weren't afraid of treading on one yourself."

"How could I?" said the Idiot. "I had all I could do trying to keep my wife from knowing that I was disturbed. It is bad enough to be worried over a crying babe, without being bothered by an irritated husband, so I simply lay there pretending to be asleep and snoring away for dear life."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"You are the most considerate man I ever heard of," said Mrs. Pedagog, smiling broadly.

"You don't mean to say," said the Poet, with a frown, "that you made your wife get up and take all the trouble and bother—"

"I'd only have been in the way," said the Idiot, meekly.

"So he kept quiet and pretended to snore like the good old Idiot that he is," put in the Doctor. "And he did the right thing, too," he added. "If all fathers would obliterate themselves on occasions of that sort, and let the mothers rule, the Tommys and Dickies and Harrys would go to sleep a great deal more quickly."

"We are rambling," said Mr. Pedagog. "The question of a father's duty towards a teething son has nothing to do with the question of a child's right to dine with his parents."

"Oh, I don't know," said the Idiot. "If we are to consider this matter scientifically we must start right. Teething is a natural first step, for if a child hath no teeth, wherewithal shall he eat dinners with his parents or without them?"

"That is all very well," retorted Mr.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Pedagog, "but to discuss fire-engines intelligently it is not necessary to go back to the times of Elisha to begin it."

Mr. Whitechoker—now the Rev. Theophilus Whitechoker, D.D., for he, too, had prospered—smiled deprecatingly. There is no man in the world who more thoroughly appreciates a biblical joke than the prosperous clergyman.

"Well," said the Idiot, reflectively, "I quite agree with your proposition that children should dine in the dining-room with their parents and not up-stairs in the nursery, with a lot of tin soldiers and golliwogs. The manners of parents are no better than those of tin soldiers and golliwogs, but their conversation is apt to prove more instructive; and as for the stern father who says his children must dine in the kitchen until they learn better manners, I never had much confidence in him or in his manners, either."

"I don't see," said the genial old gentleman who occasionally imbibed, "how you can discipline children in the nursery. If they misbehave in the dining-room you can send them up-stairs to the nursery, but if they misbehave in the nursery, where the deuce can you send them?"



• "A LITTLE FIGURE CLAD IN WHITE"





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"To bed," said Mr. Brief.

"Never!" cried the Idiot. "Children, Mr. Brief, as I understand them—and I have known three very well; myself as a boy, and Tommy and Mollie—children, as I understand them, are never naughty for the mere fun of being so. Their wickedness grows out of their wonderful stores of unexpended and unexpendable energy. Take my son Thomas on last Saturday afternoon, for instance. It was a rainy Saturday, and Tommy, instead of being out-of-doors all morning and afternoon getting rid of his superfluous vitality, had been cooped up in the house all day doing nothing. Shortly before dinner we had a difference of opinion which lasted for more time than I like to think about. I was tired and irritable. Tommy wasn't tired, but he *was* irritable, and, from his point of view, was as right as I was. He had the best of me to the extent that I was tired and he wasn't. I had the best of him to the extent that I had authority and he hadn't—"

"And who came out ahead?" asked Mr. Pedagog.

"I did," said the Idiot, "because I was bigger than he was; but what I was

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

going to say was this: Mr. Brief would have sent him to bed, thereby adding to the boy's stock of energy, already too great for his little mind to control."

"And what did you do?" asked Mr. Brief.

"Nothin'," said a small but unmistakably masculine voice from behind the portieres.

"Thomas!" said the Idiot, severely, as all turned to see who had spoken.

A little figure clad in white, ably supported by a still smaller figure, also clad in white, but with an additional ruffle about the neck, both of them barefooted, appeared in the doorway.

"Why, Mollie!" said Mrs. Idiot.

"We comed down to thee how you wath gettin' along," said the little girl.

"Yes, we did," said the boy. "But he didn't do a thing to me that day," he added, climbing on his father's knee and snuggling down against his vest-pocket with a sweet little sigh of satisfaction.

"Did you, pa?"

"Yes, Thomas," said the Idiot. "Don't you remember that I ignored you utterly?"

"Yes, I do," said Tommy. "But I'd rather be spanked than not noticed at all."



“I'D RATHER BE SPANKED THAN NOT NOTICED AT ALL”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"I am afraid," said Mr. Pedagog a few hours later, as he and Mrs. Pedagog were returning home, "I am very much afraid that the Idiot's children are being spoiled."

"I hope they are!" returned the good lady, "for really, John, I never knew a boy or a girl to grow into man or womanhood and amount to anything who hadn't been spoiled in childhood. Spoiling is another name for the attitude of parents who make comrades of their children and who do not set themselves up as tyrants—"

"But the veneration of a child for his father and mother—" Mr. Pedagog began.

"Should not degenerate into the awe which one feels for an unrelenting despot!" interrupted Mrs. Pedagog.

The old gentleman discreetly retired from the field.

As for Mrs. and Mr. Idiot, they retired that night satisfied with the evening's diversion, and just before he turned out the light the Idiot walked into the nursery to say good-night to the children.

"You're a good old pop!" said Tommy, with an affectionate hug. "*The best I ever had!*"

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

As for Mollie, she was sleeping soundly, with a smile on her placid little face which showed that, "spoiled" as she was, she was happy; and what should the Idiot or any one else seek to bring into a child's life but happiness?

### III

#### IN THE LIBRARY

THE Bibliomaniac had come off into the country to spend Sunday with the Idiot, and, as fortune would have it, Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog also appeared on the scene. After the mid-day dinner the little party withdrew to the library, where the Bibliomaniac began to discourse somewhat learnedly upon his hobby.

"I am glad to see, my dear Idiot," he observed, as he glanced about the room at the well-filled shelves, "that as you grow older you are cultivating a love of good literature."

"I heartily echo the sentiment," said Mr. Pedagog, as he noted the titles of some of the volumes. "I may add that I am pleasurablely surprised at some of your selections. I never knew, for instance, that you cared for Dryden, and yet I see



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

here on the top shelf a voluminous edition of that poet."

"Yes," said the Idiot. "I have found Dryden very useful indeed. Particularly in that binding and in so many volumes. The color goes very well with the hangings, and the space the books occupy, eked out by a dozen others of the same color, gives to that top shelf all the esthetic effect of an attractive and tasteful frieze. Then, too, it is always well," he added, with a sly wink at Mrs. Idiot, "to have a lot of books for a top shelf that is difficult to reach that nothing under the canopy could induce you to read. It is not healthful to be stretching upward, and with Dryden upon the top shelf my wife and I are never tempted to undermine our constitutions by taking him down."

The Bibliomaniac laughed.

"Your view is at least characteristic," said he, "and to tell you the absolute truth, I do not know that your judgment of the literary value of Dryden is at variance with my own. Somebody called him the Greatest Poet of a Little Age. Perhaps if the age had been bigger he'd not have shone so brilliantly."



**"I DID NOT SMOKE UNTIL I WAS FIFTY"**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Lowell," observed Mr. Pedagog, "was responsible for that remark, if I remember rightly, and I have no doubt it is a just one, and yet I do not hold it up against Dryden. Man does not make the age. The age makes the man. Had there been any inspiring influences at work to give him a motive, an incentive, Dryden might have been a greater poet. To excel his fellows was all that could rightly be expected of him, and that he did."

"Assuredly," said the Idiot. "That has always been my view, and to-day we benefit by it. If he had gone directly to oblivion, Mrs. Idiot and I should have been utterly at a loss to know what to put on that top shelf."

The Idiot offered his visitors a cigar.

"Thank you," said the Bibliomaniac, taking his and sniffing at it with all the airs and graces of a connoisseur.

"I don't know but that I will join you," said Mr. Pedagog. "I did not smoke until I was fifty, and I suppose I ought not to have taken it up then, but I did, and I have taken a great deal of comfort out of it. My allowance is fifty-two cigars a year, one for each Sunday afternoon," he added, with a kindly smile.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Well, you want to look out you don't get smoker's heart," said the Idiot. "When a man plunges into a bad habit as rashly as that, he wants to pull up before it is too late."

"I have felt no ill effects since the first one," rejoined Mr. Pedagog. "But you, my dear Idiot, how about your allowance? Is it still as great as ever? As I remember you in the old days you were something of a cigarette fiend."

"I smoke just as much, but with this difference: I do not smoke for pleasure any more, Mr. Pedagog," the Idiot replied. "As a householder I smoke from a sense of duty. It keeps moths out of the house, and insects from the plants."

The Bibliomaniac meanwhile had been investigating the contents of the lower shelves.

"You've got a few rare things here, I see," he observed, taking up a volume of short sketches illustrated by Leech, in color. "This small tome is worth its weight in gold. Where did you pick it up?"

"Auction," said the Idiot. "I didn't buy it by weight, either. I bought it by mistake. The colored pictures fascinated



**“SMOKING KEEPS INSECTS FROM THE PLANTS”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

me, and when it was put up I bawled out 'fifteen.' Another fellow said 'sixteen.' I wasn't going to split nickels so I bid 'twenty.' So we kept at it until it was run up to 'thirty-six.' Then I thought I'd break the other fellow's heart by bidding fifty, and it was knocked down to me."

"That's a stiff price, but on the whole it's worth it," said the Bibliomaniac, stroking the back of the book caressingly.

"But," said Mr. Pedagog, "if you bid on it consciously where did the mistake come in?"

The Idiot sighed. "I meant cents," he said, "but the other chap and the auctioneer meant dollars. I went up and planked down a half-dollar and was immediately made aware of my error."

"But you could have explained," said Mr. Pedagog.

"Oh, yes," said the Idiot, "I *could*, but after all I preferred to pay the extra \$49.50 rather than make a public confession of such infernal innocence before some sixty or seventy *habitués* of a book-auction room."

"And you were perfectly right!" said the Bibliomaniac. "You never would



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

have dared set your foot in that place again if you had explained. They would have made life a burden to you. Furthermore, you have not paid too dearly for the experience. The book is worth forty dollars; and to learn better than to despise the man who makes his bid cautiously, and who advances by small bids rather than by antelopian jumps, is worth many times ten dollars to the man who collects rare books seriously. In the early days I scorned to break a five-dollar bill when I was bidding, just as you refused, as you put it, to split nickels, and many a time I have paid as high as twenty-five dollars for books that could have been had for twenty-one, because of that foolish sentiment."

"I have often wondered," Mr. Pedagog put in at this point, holding his cigar in a gingerly and awed fashion, taking a puff at it between words, by which symptoms the man who seldom smokes may always be identified, "I have often wondered what was the mission of a private library, anyhow. And now that I find you two gentlemen interested in a phase of book-collecting with which I have had little sympathy myself, possibly I may, without



**"THE BIBLIOMANIAC WAS INVESTIGATING THE CONTENTS  
OF THE LOWER SHELVES"**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

being offensive, ask a question. Do you, for instance, Mr. Idiot, collect books because you wish to have something nobody else has got, or do you buy your books to read?"

"That is a deep question," said the Idiot, "and I do not know that I can answer it off-hand. I have already confessed that I bought Dryden for his decorative quality. I purchased my Thackeray to read. I bought my Pepys Diary because I find it better reading than a Sunday newspaper, quite as gossipy, and with weather reports that are fully as reliable. But that particular Leech I bought because of my youthful love for colored pictures."

"But you admit that it is valuable because of its rarity, and that compared to fifty dollars' worth of books that are not rare it is not to be compared with them from a literary point of view?" said Mr. Pedagog.

"I presume," said the Idiot, "that the fifty dollars I expended on that book would have provided me with a complete Shakespeare in one volume; all of Byron in green cloth and gold top; all of Dickens, Thackeray, Bulwer, and Austen in six

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

volumes, with a margin of forty-five dollars left with which for nine years I could have paid for a subscription to the Mercantile Library, containing all the good reading of the present day and all the standard works of the past. But I rather like to have the books, and to feel that they are my own, even if it is only for the pleasure of lending them."

"Still, if a man collects books merely for their contents—" persisted Mr. Pedagog.

"He is a wild, extravagant person," said the Idiot. "He might save himself hundreds of dollars, not to say thousands. The library on that plan need not occupy an honored place among the rooms of the house. A mere pigeon-hole with a subscriber's card to a circulating library filed away in it will do as well, or if the city or town in which he lives maintains a public library he may spare himself even that expense."

"Good for you!" exclaimed the Bibliomaniac. "That's the best answer to the critics of book-collectors I have heard yet."

"I agree with you," said Mr. Pedagog. "It is a very comprehensive reply. As



“‘ I PREFERRED TO PAY THE \$49.50 ’”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

for you, my dear Bibliomaniac, why do you collect books?"

"Because I love 'em as books," replied the Bibliomaniac. "Because of their associations, and because when I get a treasure I have the bliss of knowing I have something that others haven't."

"Then it is selfishness?" asked Mr. Pedagog.

"Just as everything else is," returned the Bibliomaniac. "You, sir, if I may be personal without wishing to be offensive, are wedded to Mrs. Pedagog. You take pleasure in knowing that she belongs to you and not to any one else. The Idiot here is proud of his children, and is glad they are his children and nobody else's. *I* am wedded to my rare books, and it rejoices my soul to pick up a volume that is unique, and to know that it belongs to me and to no one else. If that is selfishness, then all possession is selfish."

"That's about it," said the Idiot. "You collect books just as Mormons and Solomon used to collect wives. You are called a Bibliomaniac. I suppose Brigham Young and Solomon would have been known as Gamyomaniacs—though I don't suppose that age in women as in books is a



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

requisite of value to marrying men—and they are both of them supposed to be rather canny persons.”

Mr. Pedagog puffed away in silence. It was evident that the *argumentum ad hominem* did not please him.

“Well,” he said, after awhile, “possibly you are right. If a man wants a library to be a small British Museum—”

“He will take better care of his rarities than the Idiot does,” said the Bibliomaniac, putting the rare Leech back into its place. “If that were mine I’d put it out of the reach of my children.”

“I didn’t know you had any,” said the Idiot, eagerly.

“Oh, you know what I mean,” retorted the Bibliomaniac. “You place Dryden on the top shelf where Tommy and Mollie cannot get at him. But this book, which is worth ten larger paper editions of Dryden, you keep below, where the children can easily reach it. It’s a wonder to me you’ve been able to keep it in its present superb condition.”

“The mind of a child,” said Mr. Pedagog, sententiously, “is above values, above all conceits. It is the mind of sincerity, and a rare book has no greater at-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

traction to the boy or girl than one not so favored."

"That is not my reason," said the Idiot. "I know children pretty well, and I have observed that they are ambitious, and in a sense rebellious. They want to do what they cannot do. That is why, when mothers place jam on the top shelf of the pantry, the children always climb up to get it. If they would leave it on the dining-room table, within easy reach, the children would soon cease to regard it as a thing to be sought for. Make jam a required article of diet and the little ones will soon cease to want it. So with that book. If I should put that out of Tommy's reach, Tommy would lie awake nights to plan his campaign to get it. Leaving it where it is he doesn't think about it, doesn't want it, is not forbidden to have it, and so it escapes his notice."

"You have the right idea, the human idea," said Mr. Pedagog, and even the Bibliomaniac was inclined to agree. But just then Tommy happened in, with Mollie close after. The boy walked straight to the bookcase, and Mollie gathered up the large shears from the Idiot's table, and together they approached their father.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Pa," said Mollie, holding up the scissors, "can I borrow these?"

"What for?" asked the Idiot.

"We want to cut the pictures out o' this," said Tommy, holding up the fifty-dollar Leech.

After all, it is difficult to lay down a cast-iron rule as to how a private library should be constructed or arranged, particularly when one's loyalty is divided between one's children and one's merely bookish treasures.

## IV

### AS TO A SMALL DINNER

It was sad but true. Mr. and Mrs. Idiot had invited Mr. Whitechoker and Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog and the Poet to dinner, and for some reason or another the cook had taken wings unto herself and flown, and the guests were expected within two hours.

"I see now," said the Idiot, "why they call it taking French leave. Nobody who doesn't understand French understands it. If it wasn't French, or if somebody would translate it for us, we might be able to comprehend it; as it is, it is one of the mysteries, and, as usual, we must make the best of it. Life, after all, my dear, consists largely of making the best of things."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what to do," said Mrs. Idiot, despairfully, "un-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

less you telegraph them all not to come, and tell them why."

"It is too late to do that," said the Idiot, looking at his watch. "They've probably all left home by this time. Poets and clergymen and old people like Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog always do start an hour too early, for fear of missing their train."

"I wouldn't care so much about the Poet," said Mrs. Idiot; "he doesn't know enough about housekeeping, anyhow, to make it matter. But Mr. Whitechoker and Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog—I simply can't ask them to camp out, as it were. The very fact that Mrs. Pedagog would become sympathetic immediately she learned what had happened would in itself be unbearable."

"I thought women liked sympathy?" said the Idiot, with a proper manifestation of surprise.

"So they do; but you might just as well talk about claret as meaning one thing as of sympathy being all of the same brand," Mrs. Idiot answered. "Certain kinds of claret are insufferable—sour and heady. I suppose there are sixty different kinds."



**"THE COOK HAD TAKEN WINGS UNTO HERSELF"**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Sixty-two," said the Idiot, blandly. "The sixty you mean and two more whose names I have forgotten."

"I wish you would be serious for a moment," Mrs. Idiot retorted, with as near an approach to irritation as was possible to one of her amiable disposition. "And it's just the same way with sympathy," she continued; "Mrs. Pedagog will lay this whole trouble to my inexperience. Probably she never had a servant take French leave in her life on the eve of a dinner-party."

"I'll bet she didn't," said the Idiot. "And for why? Because she never gave a dinner-party in all her life. The habits of early life cling unto old age, and even as in her early days as a boarding-house keeper she never gave anything, so now she doubtless considers giving a dinner as a reckless waste of opportunity. And she is quite right. Does a lawyer invite his friends to join him in an opinion? Never. Does Mr. Tiffany request Mr. and Mrs. Idiot to accept a diamond tiara given in their honor? Not. Does a true poet, with three names on his autograph, give a poem to anybody when he can sell it? Not if he knows it. Why, then, ex-



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

pect a landlady, by birth and previous training, to *give* a dinner?"

"I notice," said Mrs. Idiot, severely, "that you are always willing to give your views!"

"Precisely, my dear, and that proves my point," replied the Idiot, amiably. "I am not a professional viewer, and I am not a photographer by trade. Therefore, why should I not *give* my views? But really," he added, "I wouldn't bother; it'll all come out right. I don't know just how, but I am confident we shall have the most glorious dinner of our lives. When I was down cellar this morning looking at the gas-meter I saw two big boxes full of potatoes, a can of French pease, and a bottle of sarsaparilla, and if they don't like what they get it will be because they are exacting. And I'll wager you from what I know of their manners that if you gave them dried apples, cold tongue, and milk they'd say it was the most delightful repast they ever sat down to."

"But *I'd* know they didn't mean it," said Mrs. Idiot, smiling in spite of her woe.

"And that brings up the question, why



**“TWO BIG BOXES OF POTATOES, A CAN OF FRENCH PEASE, AND  
A BOTTLE OF SARSAPARILLA”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

should your conscience be troubled by the insincerity of others?" said he. "Now, I'll tell you what we'll do. You fry the potatoes and I'll boil the can of pease; I think four minutes will boil them hard, like an egg, and together we'll put the sarsaparilla on ice, and bluff the whole thing through. Bluffing was always my strong point, and I have noticed, my dear, that in whatever I have tried to do since we were married you have contributed at least ninety per cent. to success. My bluff plus your efforts to make the thing a go will send our dinner to a premium."

Mrs. Idiot remained properly silent. As a matter of fact, she was not even listening. She was considering. What on earth to do was the question in her mind, and it so entirely absorbed it that she fortunately had little left for the rather easy views of the Idiot himself.

"What is a dinner, anyhow?" the Idiot added, after the silence had to his mind become oppressive. "Is it a mere meal? Do the Poet and Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog and Mr. Whitechoker come here merely to get something to eat? Or do they come for the pleasure of our society, or for the pleasure of leaving home, or what? As I

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

understand it, people go out to dine not because they have not a sufficiency of food at home, but because they wish to meet other people. That's what I do. I can always have something better to eat at home than I can get at somebody else's house; and furthermore, it is a more natural meal. Dinners generally are made up of pretty little things that nobody likes, and have no sustenance in them. A successful dinner lies not in successful cooking, but in pleasing conversation. Wherefore, it is not the cook, but the host and hostess who make a failure or a success of a dinner."

"Then I presume if we simply spread the table and let you talk our guests will be satisfied?" said Mrs. Idiot, blandly.

"Precisely," the Idiot replied. "It will be delightful. Just think of the menu! Instead of oysters I will indulge in a few opinions as to the intellectual qualities of bivalves generally, finishing up with a glowing tribute to the man who is content to be a clam and not talk too much. In the place of *purée* we will tackle some such subject as the future of Spain. I think I could ladle out a few sound ideas on that subject that would

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

be as clear as the purest *consommé*. Then for fish, that would be easy. A good trout story, with imagination sauce, would do very well. For the *entrée* I will give you one of my most recent poems, and the roast will be—”

“And the rest of us are to sit and twiddle our thumbs while you soliloquize?” demanded Mrs. Idiot. “I rather think not. I will provide the roast, my dear John, and it will consist largely of remarks upon the ways of cooks.”

“A very proper subject for a roast,” observed the Idiot, complacently, “and in your present frame of mind I think it will be not only well done, but rare as well, with plenty of crisp. And so we can simply talk this dinner through. It will be novel, certainly, and if you provide plenty of bread and butter no one need go away hungry.”

“Very true,” Mrs. Idiot answered. “And now that you have had your fun, suppose we put our minds on the serious aspect of the case. Two hours from now four people are coming here hungry—”

“I have it!” cried the Idiot, delightedly. “Let’s *borrow* a cook! I don’t believe it’s ever been done before. It

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

would be splendid, not only in getting us out of our troubles, but in establishing an entirely new principle in domestic science. What is the use of neighbors who will not be neighborly and lend you their most cherished possession?"

"None at all," sighed Mrs. Idiot, despairingly.

"Now, when we lived in our flat in New York the people up-stairs borrowed our ice," said the Idiot; "the people down-stairs borrowed our dining-room chairs; the people across the hall borrowed butter and milk and eggs, and I think we once borrowed a lemon from the people on the top floor."

"Never!" cried Mrs. Idiot.

"Yes, we did, my dear," insisted the Idiot. "At least I did. You and the children were off in the country, and one hot summer's night, two years ago, I was consumed with a desire for a glass of lemonade, and as there were no lemons in the house, or the flat, I sent out to borrow. I began at the basement and worked up towards the roof, and ultimately got what I wanted, although, as I have said, it was the top-flat people I got it from."



**“THE PEOPLE DOWN-STAIRS BORROWED OUR DINING-ROOM  
CHAIRS’”**





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"And did you ever return it?" demanded Mrs. Idiot.

"I regret to say that I didn't," said the Idiot. "But I will, and with interest. I wonder what two years' interest on a lemon is!" he added. "I suppose that a borrowed lemon compounded at the rate of six per cent. could be paid off by a lemon and one small Bermuda potato. I will send my check for both to those people to-morrow. What was their name?"

"I never knew," said Mrs. Idiot. "I never liked them, and I never called. I am sorry you are under obligations to them."

"Only for a lemon, though, dear," said the Idiot, "at six per cent."

"But what does all this prove?" demanded the poor little housekeeper.

"That the principle of lending is recognized among neighbors," the Idiot explained. "If a neighbor will lend a lemon, surely a neighbor will lend a cook. The principle involved is the same in both cases. Particularly so in this case, for my experience with cooks has been that they are, after all, for the most part nothing but human lemons."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

If the departed Bridget had been anything but full of sourness she would not have left us so unexpectedly."

"You don't really think for a moment, do you, that the Jimpsonberrys would lend us their cook, or that she would come, or that I would ask them?" said Mrs. Idiot.

"Well, I suppose not," said the Idiot. "I suppose not. *But I don't see why!* First, the Jimpsonberrys, as our neighbors, ought to be willing to get us out of our trouble. Second, we don't ask their cook to come for nothing. By coming she will receive an addition to her wages which will help her to endow a policeman with a moderate fortune some day when she marries him. As for your asking Mrs. Jimpsonberry to lend us her cook for a few hours, that is the main objection. When one borrows one must give collateral, and it may be that it would embarrass you to offer Mike as security for the safe return of the Jimpsonberrys' cook. Anyhow, I see weak points in my plan, and we'd better abandon it. If the Jimpsonberrys' cook is the only available incendiary in the neighborhood, we'd better stop where we are. When we dined at





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Jimpsonberrys' last week I went away feeling that Jimpsonberry ought to collect fire insurance on that dinner. It wasn't cooked; it was a plain case of arson."

It was at this precise moment, when poor Mrs. Idiot was beginning to despair of getting any advice of value from her husband, that the telephone-bell rang, and the Idiot rose up to answer the call.

"Hello!" he said.

"Oh! Hello, old man!" he added.

"That you? Glad to see you."

"Yes," he continued, after a pause.

"Of course we expect you."

"Seven o'clock sharp," he remarked, a moment later. "You'll surely be here?" Then after a second pause, he added:

"Good! You can stay all night if you wish; we've plenty of room. Good-bye."

"Who was it?" asked Mrs. Idiot, as the Idiot hung up the receiver of the telephone.

"The Poet," replied the Idiot. "He wanted to know at what hour dinner was."

"Oh, dear!" cried Mrs. Idiot. "Why

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

didn't you tell him the dinner isn't for to-night, but to-morrow night?"

"Didn't need to, my dear," said the Idiot, lighting a cigarette. "We've made a slight mistake. You invited these people, it now appears, for the twenty-ninth."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Idiot.

"Well, my love," said the Idiot, with an affectionate glance, "to-day is the—ah—the twenty-eighth."

Mrs. Idiot drew a sigh of relief.

"My! she cried, "what a blessing! I wonder how I got so mixed!"

"It's economy, perhaps," suggested the Idiot. "If you will insist on buying out-of-date diaries and last year's calendars at bargain-counters because they are cheap, I don't really see how you can expect to keep up with the times."

Mrs. Idiot laughed heartily. Her relief of mind was unmistakable.

"What would you have done, John, if this had really been the night?" she asked later.

"Oh, I don't know," said the Idiot. "I think I should have taken you to New York to dinner, and bluffed our guests into believing they had come up on the

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

wrong night. It is very easy for a host to put his guests in the wrong if he wants to. I don't, but if I must, I must."

As it was, the family dinner that night was a great success in spite of the absence of the cook, because Mrs. Idiot, who is an expert with the chafing-dish, found several odds and ends in the late cook's domains, which, under her expert manipulation, became dishes which the Idiot said afterwards "remained long in the memory without proving too permanent a tax upon the digestion."



## V

### ON THE MAINTENANCE OF AN ATTIC

THE Idiot had been laid up for a week. That is to say, he was too indisposed to attend to business at his office, and the family physician thought it would be a good idea if his patient would be content to remain quietly indoors for a little while. To this the Idiot cheerfully consented.

"If there is one thing that I can do to perfection," he said, "it is resting. Some men are born leisurely, some achieve leisure, and some are discharged by their employers. I belong to the first two classes. I can never become one of the third class, because, being my own employer, I am naturally pleased with myself, and am not likely to dispense with my own services."

And so he stayed at home, and for a week pottered about the house, as he put it, and he had a glorious time.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning, dear?" asked Mrs. Idiot on the morning of the first day. "I've got to go to market, and there are one or two other little things to be attended to which will keep me out for some hours. Do you think you can amuse yourself while I am out?"

"Well, I don't know," said the Idiot. "I can try. Of course, you know, my dear, that I am a good deal of a baby yet. However, if you can trust me to stay all by my lonesome for two or three hours I'll try to behave. I promise not to take the piano apart, and I vow I won't steal any jam, and I sha'n't float hair-brushes in the bath-tub pretending that they are armored cruisers looking for Spaniards, and I'll try to be good, but I can't make any promises."

Mrs. Idiot smiled, as an indulgent guardian should, and went forth. The Idiot stayed at home and enjoyed himself. What he did is perhaps best indicated by his remarks some time later at a Sunday-night tea at which Mr. and Mrs. Pedagog, and Mr. Brief, the lawyer, were present.

"Mrs. Pedagog," said the Idiot, "did you ever have an attic?"

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"A what?" demanded the Schoolmaster, naturally somewhat nonplussed.

"An attic," said the Idiot. "A favored spot wherein to potter, to root, to rummage."

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Pedagog, after a moment of deliberation. "I have had an attic, but it never seemed to me to be a particularly interesting spot. I've used it as a sort of store-room for things I didn't know what to do with."

"Useless things," suggested Mr. Pedagog.

"Entirely so," acquiesced the good lady.

"Then if they are useless, why keep them?" queried the Idiot. "Useless things might better be thrown away than stored away even in an attic."

"Oh, as for that," rejoined Mrs. Pedagog, "they were useless in the sense that there was nothing I could do with them, and yet there was generally some quality of association or something about them that so appealed to me that I couldn't quite throw them away, or even bring myself to give them away."

"That is the idea," said the Idiot. "One's cherished possessions are often stored away up-stairs and forgotten, and



"'I SET OFF A GIANT CRACKER UNDER HIS CHAIR'"



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

then sometimes years after you'll go rummaging about the house for lack of some other employment; an old trunk, a wooden box, will be unearthed in the attic, and then what a flood of memories will come rushing back over you as the long-forgotten objects come to light, one by one."

"I have had much the same experience," said Mr. Brief, "in what I might term my professional attic. We keep a room for the storage of old papers, and strange exhibits in litigation turn up there frequently that bring back old-time lawsuits in a most interesting fashion."

"I suppose, then," observed Mr. Pedagog, with a shrug of tolerant contempt, "that the attic is, in your estimation, a sort of repository for family archives."

"That's about it," said the Idiot. "You ought to see mine. There are archives from the Ark in mine. I've got all the portraits of my unpopular relatives up there, and such a gallery of smug-looking individuals you never saw. There's Uncle Jedediah, who hated me because I set off a giant cracker under his chair one Fourth of July, and who from that day vowed I was born to be hanged; and who

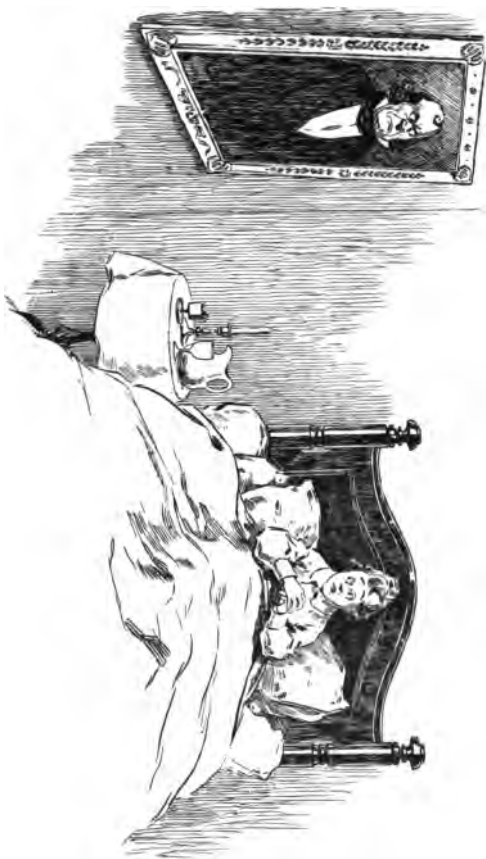
## THE IDIOT AT HOME

sent me a crayon portrait of himself the following Christmas—”

“That seems to me to show a kindly feeling, not one of hatred, towards you,” suggested Mrs. Pedagog.

“Oh no,” said the Idiot, with a laugh. “You never knew my dear old Uncle Jed. He sent it in a pure spirit of revenge. He had to send something, and he picked out the one thing he had reason to know I didn’t want; and he was likewise aware that my mother had a sense of the proprieties and would hang that portrait upon the wall of my bedroom, whence it could stare at me, disapprovingly, forevermore. Still, when I became the head of my own house, I did not take a mean-spirited revenge on Uncle Jedediah’s portrait by selling it to one of the comic papers with a joke under it; I gave it the nicest, warmest, most comfortable spot I could find for it under a pile of old magazines in the attic, and the other day when it came to light again I greeted it with an affectionate smile; and the picture of the old gentleman rising hurriedly from over the giant cracker on that long-forgotten Fourth, brought vividly to mind by the portrait, brought tears to my eyes, I laugh-

“‘WOULD HANG THAT PORTRAIT UPON THE WALL OF MY BEDROOM’”







## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ed so heartily. It really was very affecting."

Mr. Pedagog gazed at the Idiot fondly.

"You are a great boy," he said.

"You'd never suspect it, but I had a similar case of Uncle Jed, but the years I have lived since have softened my feelings so that I remember my old relative with a certain degree of affection."

"I shall never believe, my dear John," said Mrs. Pedagog, "that in your day boys ever placed giant crackers under their uncles' chairs."

"We never did, my love," Mr. Pedagog responded, quickly.

"Why, of course not," laughed the Idiot. "They couldn't, you know. They hadn't been invented. What was your trouble with Uncle Jed, Mr. Pedagog?"

"Oh, our difference of opinion was rather of an ethical import," replied Mr. Pedagog, genially. "My Uncle Jed was a preacher, and he used to speak entirely from notes which he would make out the night before and place in the pocket of his black coat. All I did was to take the notes of his next day's sermon out of his pocket one Saturday evening, and put in their stead a—ah—a recipe for what we

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

called Washington pie—and a very good pie it was.”

“John!” ejaculated Mrs. Pedagog.

“I *did*, my dear,” confessed the School-master, “and really I have never regretted it, although my particular uncle gave me a distressingly acrid and dreary lecture on my certain future when he found out what had happened. Yet what did happen, though mischievously intended, resulted in great good, for when the dear old gentleman stood up in the pulpit and started to preach the next morning, with the recipe for a Washington pie as the only available note at hand, he pulled himself together and preached off-hand the finest sermon of his life, and he discovered then the secret of his after-success. He became known ultimately as one of the most brilliant preachers of his time, and from that moment never went into the pulpit with any factitious aids to his memory.”

“You mean cribs, don’t you?” asked the Idiot.

“That is what college-boys call them, I believe,” said Mr. Pedagog. “I will say further that a year before he died *my* Uncle Jed told me that it was my mis-



**“ ‘STARTED TO PREACH WITH THE RECIPE FOR A  
WASHINGTON PIE’ ”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

chievous act that had given him the hint which became the keynote of his eloquence," he added, complacently. "I shall always remember him affectionately."

"Of course," said the Idiot. "No doubt we all remember our Uncle Jeds affectionately. I certainly do. He was my mother's brother, and he meant well. I never really blamed him for not knowing how to sympathize with a boyish prank, because there has never been a school of instructions for uncles. Unclehood is about the hardest hood man has to wear, and as I have observed uncles and their habits, they either spoil or repel the small chaps and chappesses who happen to be made their nephews and nieces by an accident of birth. Uncles are either intensely genial or intensely irritable, and as far as I am concerned it is my belief that our colleges should include in their curriculum a chair of 'Uncleism.' Unclehood is a relationship that man has to accept. It is thrust upon him. He can't help himself. To be a father or a mother is a matter of volition. But even in a free country like our own, if a man has a brother or a sister he is liable to find him-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

self an uncle at any time whether he wishes to be one or not. Then when it happens he's got to reason out a course of procedure without any basis in previous experience."

"Why don't you write a book on 'Hints to Uncles,' or 'The Complete Aunt,'" suggested Mr. Brief. "I have no doubt it would make good reading."

"Thanks for the idea," said the Idiot. "I think I'll do it. Not in the hope of profit, but for the benefit of the race."

"What has all this to do with attics?" asked Mrs. Idiot.

"The natural resting-place of the bad uncle," explained the Idiot. "Still, I maintain that it is every man's duty to keep an attic for the useless things, as Mrs. Pedagog calls them, which some day, when he least expects it, will carry his mind back to other days. The word itself, attic, carries the mind back to the splendors of Athens and other things that are out of date. When I was ill I found sincerest pleasure in rummaging. You can't rummage in a library if your library is properly looked after. You can't rummage in a bedroom in a well-kept house. You all know what parlors are—designed

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

largely for the reception of people who come out to call upon you in their best Sunday clothes, and who would never think of calling upon you intimately, as a friend might, in his knickerbockers. You can't rummage there. The only place where one may rummage with any degree of success is in the attic, and my experience has been such that I believe my recent illness has contributed to my health. My mind has been carried back to conditions that used to be. Conditions which existed then and which were inferior to conditions which now prevail make me satisfied with the present. Where old-time conditions were better than the existing one I have naturally discovered how to improve. Rummaging, therefore, is improving to the mind and contributes to one's contentment.

"Then there are good economical reasons for the maintenance of an attic," the Idiot continued. "I found enough old boyhood collections of various things there to keep Tommy and Mollie happy for years without my having to pay out a penny for birthday presents—old stamps, old coins, old picture papers, and, I assure you, a lot of old newspapers, too, with bet-



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ter and more readable news in them than is now to be found in any of our modern bilious journals. Then the bundles of letters that came out of that place—my mother's letters to me, written while I was away at school; my father's letters in the old days at your house, Mrs. Pedagog, which did much to keep me straight then and re-reading of which doesn't hurt now; and, best of all," he added, with an affectionate glance at Mrs. Idiot, "a little bundle of my own letters to a certain person tied up with a blue ribbon, and full of pressed roses and autumn leaves and promises—"

"In the attic?" asked Mr. Brief, with a dry smile. "Is that where Mrs. Idiot keeps your promises?"

Mrs. Idiot blushed. "I have a cedar chest full of treasures up there," she said. "I thought it was locked."

"Well, anyhow, I found them," said the Idiot, cheerfully; "and while they were not especially good reading, they were good reminders of other days. It wouldn't be a bad idea if every married man were to read over the letters of his days of courtship once a year. I think it would bring back more forcibly than any-



**" 'A LITTLE BUNDLE OF MY OWN LETTERS' "**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

thing else the conditions of the contract which he was inviting the young partner of his joys to sign. If an attic never held anything but bundles of one's old love-letters it would demonstrate its right to become an institution."

"Very true," said the lawyer; "but," he added, prompted by that cautious spirit which goes always with the professional giver of advice, "suppose that side by side with that little bundle of pressed flowers and autumn leaves and promises one should chance to find another little bundle of pressed flowers and autumn leaves and promises—the promises written by some other hand than the hand that is rummaging in the cedar chest? What then? Would that prove a pleasing find?"

"Oh, as for that," the Idiot remarked, "when I advocate the maintenance of an attic as one of the first duties of mankind, I mean its intelligent maintenance. The thing which makes of the British Museum, the National Attic of Great Britain, a positive educational force is its intelligent direction. It is the storehouse of the useless possessions of the British Empire which have an inspiring quality. There is nothing in it which makes a Briton think

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

less of himself or which in any way unpleasantly disturbs his equanimity. So with the attic of the humble citizen. It must be intelligently directed if it is to become an institution, and should not be made the repository of useless things which ought to be destroyed, among which I class that other possible bundle to which you refer."

And inasmuch as the whole party agreed to the validity of this proposition, the subject was dropped, and the Idiot and his guests wandered on to other things.

## VI

### THE IDIOT'S GARDEN

"I SHOULD think, my dear Idiot," Mr. Pedagog observed one summer evening, as his host stood upon the back piazza of "Castle Idiot," as they had come to call the dwelling-place of their friend, "that with all this space you have about you, you would devote some of it to a garden."

"Why, I do," said the Idiot. "I've got a small patch down there behind the tennis-court, fifty by one hundred feet, under cultivation. The stuff we get is almost as good as the average canned goods, too. We had a stalk of asparagus the other night that was magnificent as far as it went. It was edible for quite a sixteenth of an inch, or at least I was told so. That portion of it had already been nibbled off by my son Thomas while it was resting in the pantry waiting to be

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

served. However, the inedible end which arrived was quite sturdy, and might have stood between my family and starvation if the necessity had arisen."

"One stalk of asparagus is a pretty poor crop, I should say," observed the lawyer, with a laugh.

"You might think so," said the Idiot. "But everything in the world is comparative, after all. Ants build ant-hills which are several feet lower than the Alps, and yet they are monumental, considering that they were made by ants. All things considered, Mrs. Idiot and I were proud of our asparagus crop, and distinctly regretted that it did not survive to be served in proper state at dinner. If I remember rightly, Thomas was severely reprimanded for his privateering act in biting off the green end of it before I had a chance to see it."

"'Twasn't specially good," said Tommy, loftily.

"I am very glad it was not, my son," said the Idiot. "I should be very sorry to hear that you had derived the slightest sensation of pleasure from your piratical and utterly inexcusable act."

"Do you usually serve so small a por-



“ ‘ WE SPRINKLED IT IN PERSON ’ ”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

tion of the product of your garden?" asked Mr. Brief.

"Sometimes we don't serve anything at all from it," said the Idiot, "which you will observe is smaller yet. In this instance Mrs. Idiot intended a little surprise for me. We had struggled with that asparagus-bed for some time. The madame had studied up asparagus in her botany. I had looked it up in the cyclopedia and the Century dictionary. We had ordered it in various styles when we dined out at the New York hotels, and we had frequently bought cans of it in order to familiarize ourselves more intimately with its general personal appearance. Then we consulted people we thought would be likely to know how to obtain the best results, and what they told us to do we did, but somehow it didn't work. Our asparagus crop languished. We sprinkled it in person. We put all sorts of garden cosmetics on it to improve its complexion, but it seemed hopeless, and finally when I footed up the asparagus item in my account-book, and discovered that we had paid out enough money without results of a satisfactory nature to have kept us in canned asparagus for four years, we

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

got discouraged, and resolved to give it up. It was while Michael, our gardener, was removing the evidences of our failure that he discovered the one perfect stalk, and like the honest old gardener that he is, he immediately brought it into the house and presented it to my wife. She naturally rejoiced that our efforts had not been entirely vain, and in her usual spirit of self-sacrifice had the stalk cooked as a surprise for me. As I have told you, that small circumstance Thomas, over which we seem to have no control, got ahead of us—”

“ You was surprised, wasn’t you, pa ?” demanded the boy.

“ Somewhat, my son,” said the Idiot. “ but not in the way your mother had designed, exactly.”

“ Is asparagus the extent of your gardening ?” queried Mrs. Pedagog.

“ Oh no, indeed !” replied Mrs. Idiot. “ We’ve had peas and beets and beans and egg-plant and corn—almost everything, in fact, including potatoes.”

“ Yes, ma’am,” said the Idiot, “ almost everything, including potatoes. Our pea crop was lovely. We had five podfuls for dinner on the Fourth of July, and the



“HE DISCOVERED THE ONE PERFECT STALK”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

children celebrated the day by podding them for the cook. They popped open almost as noisily as a torpedo. It was really very enjoyable. Indeed, one of the results of that pea crop has been to give me an idea by which I may some day redeem my losses on the asparagus-bed. An explosive pea which should be edible, and yet would pop open with the noise of a small fire-cracker, would be a delight to the children and serviceable for the table. I don't exactly know how to bring about the desired results, but it seems to me if I were to mix a little saltpetre in the water with which we irrigate our pea-trees the required snap would be obtained. Then on the Fourth of July the children, instead of burning their fingers and filling their parents with nervous dread setting off fire-crackers, could sit out on the back piazza and shell the peas for the cook—"

"I'd rather shell Spangyards," said Mollie.

"I am surprised at you, my child," said the Idiot. "A little girl like you should be an advocate of peace, not of war."

"You can't eat Spaniards, either, can you, pa?" said Tommy, who, while he

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

shared Mollie's views as to the comparative value for shelling purposes of peas and Spaniards, was nevertheless quite interested in the development of a pea-pod that would open with a bang.

"No, Tommy," said the Idiot, "you can't eat Spaniards, and they'd be sure to disagree with you if you could."

"That is a very interesting proposition of yours," said Mr. Brief, "but it has its dangers. A dynamite pea would prove very attractive so long as its explosive qualities were confined to the pod and its opening. But how are you going to keep the saltpetre out of the peas themselves?"

"That is where the difficulty comes in," said the Idiot. "I frankly don't know how we could insulate the peas from the effects of the saltpetre."

"It would be deucedly awkward," observed the Bibliomaniac, "if, as might very well happen, one or two of the peas should become so thoroughly impregnated with the stuff that they would explode in the mouth of the person who was eating them, like bombs in miniature."

"True," said the Idiot. "The only safeguard against that would be to compel the cook to test every pea before she



“IT WOULD BE DECIDEDLY AWKWARD . . . IF THEY WOULD EXPLODE IN THE MOUTH  
OF THE PERSON WHO WAS EATING THEN”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

cooked it. She could slam them down on the hearth-stone like torpedoes, and every one that didn't go off could be cooked and served with safety. Still, there would be danger even then. A careless cook might forever ruin the teeth of a favored guest. I guess I'd better give up the idea."

"Oh, don't, pa!" cried Tommy, his interest in explosive vegetables worked up to a high pitch. "I'll test 'em all for you, and if they work I don't see why you couldn't raise dynamite punkins!"

"It would be a strong temptation, my son," said the Idiot, "which is all the more reason why I should abandon the plan. A dynamite punkin, as you call it, would wreck the whole neighborhood if one should set it off properly. No, we will, after all, confine our attention to vegetables of a more pacific nature. The others might prove more profitable at first, but when the novelty of them wore off, and one realized only their danger, a great deal of the pleasure one derives from eating fresh vegetables would be utterly destroyed."

Tommy looked out over the railing of the piazza, deep regret and disappoint-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ment depicted in his brown little face; but if the glitter of his eyes meant anything it meant that the idea of putting vegetables on a war footing was not going to be allowed to drop into oblivion; and if the small youth progresses in inventive genius in a fair ratio to his past achievements in that line, I have no doubt that if a Vesuvian pumpkin *can* be produced at all, the day will dawn when Thomas is hailed as its inventor.

"Is it true," asked Mr. Brief. "that home-raised peas are sweeter than any other?"

"We think so," said Mrs. Idiot.

"We know so," amended the Idiot. "That Fourth-of-July night when we ate those five podfuls we discovered that fact. Five podfuls of peas are not enough to feed a family of four on, so we mixed them in with a few more that we bought at the grocer's, and we could tell ours from the others every time, they were so much sweeter."

The Bibliomaniac laughed scornfully.

"Pooh!" said he. "How did you know that they were yours that were sweet, and not the grocery-bought peas?"

"How does a father know his own chil-



**“‘SHE COULD SLAM THEM DOWN ON THE HEARTHSTONES  
LIKE TORPEDOES’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

dren?" said the Idiot. "If you'd labored over those five pods as hard and assiduously as we did, nursing them through their infant troubles, guarding them against locusts and potato-bugs, carefully watching their development from infancy into the full vigor of a mature peahood, I guess you'd know your own from those of others. It's instinct, my dear Bibliomaniac."

"Tell about the strawberry, pa," said Tommy, who liked to hear his father talk, in which respect I fear he takes strongly after his parent.

"Well," said the Idiot, "it's not much of a story. There was one. We had a strawberry patch twenty feet by ten. We had plenty of straw and plenty of patch, but the berries were timid about appearing. The results were similar to those in our asparagus venture. One berry was discovered trying to hide itself under half a bale of straw one morning, and while I was looking for Mrs. Idiot, to ask her to come down to the garden and see it grow, a miserable robin came along and bit its whole interior out. I hope the bird enjoyed it, because on a bed-rock estimate that berry cost twenty dollars. That is

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

one of the things about gardening that make me especially weary. One doesn't mind spending forty-four dollars on a stalk of asparagus that is eaten, even surreptitiously, by a member of one's own family; but to pay twenty dollars for a strawberry to be wasted on a fifteen-cent robin is, to say the least, irritating."

"You forget, John," said Mrs. Idiot, with a somewhat mirthful look in her eyes, "that we got fifteen boxes out of the strawberry-patch later."

"No, I don't," said the Idiot. "I was coming to that, and it involves a confession. You were so blue about the loss of our one beautiful berry that I entered into a conspiracy with Michael to make that patch yield. The fifteen boxes of berries that we took out subsequently were bought at a New York fruit-store and judiciously scattered about the patch where you would find them. I had hoped you would never find it out, but when you spoke the other day of expending thirty-eight dollars on that strawberry-patch next year, I resolved then to undeceive you. This is the first favorable opportunity I have had."

Mrs. Idiot laughed heartily. "I knew

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

it all along," she said. "Michael came to me with them and asked for instructions as to where to put them. Really, I—ah—I arranged them under the straw myself."

"What an ass a hired man can be!" ejaculated the Idiot. "I shall discharge Michael to-morrow."

"I wish you would," said Mrs. Idiot. "Ever since the conspiracy he has been entirely too independent."

"Don't discharge Michael, papa," said Mollie. "He's awful nice. He's always willin' to stop anything he's doing to play with Tommy and me."

"You bet he is!" cried Tommy. "He's a dandy, Mike is. He never says a word when I sit under the sprinkler, and he told me the other day that his grandfather would have been king of Ireland if Queen Victoria hadn't come in. He said the Queen was a lady, and his grandfather gave up his seat to her because he was a gentleman and couldn't do anything else."

"Very well," said the Idiot, suavely. "Then I won't discharge Michael. One feels a better American, a better Republican, if he has a royal personage in his



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

employ. I always wondered where Michael got his imperious manner; now I know. As a descendant of a long line of kings it could not be otherwise. I will give him another chance. But let me give you all fair warning. If next summer Michael does not succeed in producing from my garden four beets, ten pods of peas, three string-beans, and less than ten thousand onions, he goes. I shall not pay a gardener forty dollars a month unless he can raise three dollars' worth of vegetables a year."

"But really," said Mr. Pedagog, "haven't you raised anything in your garden?"

"Oh yes," said the Idiot. "I've raised my water bill in the garden. I used to pay twelve dollars a quarter for water, but now the bills come to at least twenty-five dollars. Truly, a garden is not without profit to some one."

## VII

### HOUSEHOLD POETRY

"YES," said the Idiot, in response to an inquiry from the Poet, who was passing a Sunday with him at Castle Idiot, "I have found that there is a great deal of poetry in the apparently uninspiring little things of a household. There is to me as much poetry in a poker as there is in a snow-clad Alp, if you only have an eye to find it; and I am sure that to thousands of housewives the whole land over a sonnet to a clothes-pin, written by one who knows the clothes-pin's nature intimately, would be far more appealing than a similar number of lines trying to prove that we are all miserable phantoms flitting across a morass of woe."

The Poet pulled away thoughtfully at his pipe. He was a broad-minded poet, and while he had never owned a poker of his own, he was ready to admit its possi-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

bilities; but he could not follow his friend closely enough to admit that it contained as much that was inspiring as did Mont Blanc, for instance, a bright particular Alp of which he was very fond.

The Idiot continued:

"A ton of coal contains far more warmth than a woman's eyebrow; sends the mind of a thoughtful person chasing backward to the time when it lay snugly hid in the fair breast of nature; to the joys and woes of the toilers who mined it; through a variety of complexities of life, every one of them fraught with noble thoughts. Yet who ever wrote dainty verses to a ton of coal, and who hasn't at one time or another in his life written about the eyebrows of some woman?"

The Poet laughed this time. "A triolet to a ton of coal would be a glorious thing now, wouldn't it?" he observed.

"No," said the Idiot. "A triolet could never be a glorious thing under any circumstances; but to the extent that a ton of coal contains a certain amount of grandeur in the service it renders to mankind, I think the form would be ennobled somewhat by the substance. Let's try it and see."



“THE JOYS AND WOKS OF THE TOILERS WHO  
MINED IT’ ”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"You do it," said the Poet; "I really don't think I could do the subject justice."

The Idiot got out a pencil and a pad of paper and began.

"I don't think I'll make it a triolet," he said, after biting the end of his pencil for a few moments. "A whole ton is a good deal to cram into a triolet. I'll just make it a plain poem of the go-as-you-please variety instead, eh?"

"In the manner of Whitman, perhaps?" suggested the Poet, dryly.

"Just so," said the Idiot. "In the manner of Whitman; in fact, I think the manner of Whitman is the only manner for the poetic description of a ton of coal."

He began to scribble on the pad.

"I'm going to call this 'Content,'" he said in a few moments. "Contentment strikes me as the main lesson a ton of coal teaches."

He scribbled on, and in four or five minutes he put down his pencil and read the following lines:

"I'm glad I'm not as men are—  
Always worrying about something, and often  
about nothing;  
About what was and what wasn't;

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Fretting about what may be and what might  
have been;  
Wondering whether when they are called upon to  
do their duty  
They'll be able to do it,  
And generally deciding they won't,  
To their own discomfort.  
And if so be they're women,  
Cogitating from morn till night,  
From night till morn,  
Wherewithal shall they be clothed,  
And if their hats are on straight!  
Yea!  
I am glad I am not like one of these,  
But am myself—  
A ton of coal—jetty in my blackness and lumi-  
nous in my bituminosity.  
Lying here in the cellar content and not bother-  
ing a bit.  
Not needing income or clothes, and wearing no  
hat, and with no complexion to bother about.  
Happy and serene about my duty,  
Certain that I shall succeed when the time for  
action comes;  
Knowing that I shall burn,  
And in the burning glow like the polar star.  
Cackling and crackling,  
Hissing and smoking,  
Full of heat,  
A satisfaction to mankind,  
And never worth less than \$5.65, delivered!  
Ah, me! What bliss to be a ton of coal!  
I am content."

The Poet nodded his pleasure at the effort. "It is charmingly put," he said. "I must confess, my dear Idiot, that the idea of contentment is the last



“‘FOR THOUGH I’M BUT A CARPET-TACK  
AFAR FROM MOIL AND STRIFE,  
NO ONE CAN EVER TRULY SAY  
THAT MINE’S A POINTLESS LIFE’”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

one that I should ever have extracted from contemplation of a binful of anthracite, and yet when I consider how you put it I wonder it has not occurred to every one. You have the manner of the Whitman parodist down fine, too."

"Thank you," said the Idiot. "It is entirely natural to me. I think, too, that using the Whitman lack of form carries with it the notion of the coal sliding down the chute, don't you? Coal runs into the cellar in such an irresponsible, formless way, eh?"

"Precisely," smiled the Poet. "You have the right notion about that. The form of a poem should really be adapted to the substance. It should be descriptive, always. Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade' has in its rhythm nothing more or less than the clatter of the horses' hoofs as they and their riders dashed through the valley of death at Balaklava. And how vividly Southey's brook comes before the mind in its mad rush downward as one reads that wonderfully lyrical poem. Why don't you write a book of household poetry? You seem to me to be eminently well qualified to undertake it."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"I intend to," said the Idiot. "In fact, I've begun it already. Written five or six. Like to see 'em?"

"Indeed I should," said the Poet. "Anything you do interests me."

The Idiot went to his desk and took from it a few pages of manuscript.

"Here is a thing on pokers I did the other night. I called it 'The Song of the Poker Bold.'" And then he read these lines:

"Warder of the grate am I,  
Ever standing near;  
Poking, poking all day long,  
Knowing naught of fear.

"Keeping coals up to their work,  
Setting them aglow,  
Minding not the scorching heat,  
Rather like it so.

"Knocking ashes right and left,  
Flirting with the tiles;  
Bossing tongs and seeing that  
The brazen kettle biles.

"And the little girls and boys  
As they watch me pause,  
Wishing that I'd talk and tell  
'Bout old Santa Claus!

"Cracking jokes with crickets on  
The merry hearth, elate;  
Happy lot indeed is mine—  
Warder of the grate!"

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Splendid!" cried the Poet, clapping his hands with enthusiasm. "Splendid! A good stiff pokeresque lyric, and your characterization of the poker as the 'Warder of the Grate' gives it a flavor of romance. You could almost imagine the implement going out into a mediæval world in search of knightly adventure—a sort of hearth-stone Quixote. Have you tackled the clothes-pin yet?"

"Yes," replied the Idiot. "Indeed, my first effort was a lyric on the clothes-pin. I started one night to do the contents of the kitchen-dresser drawer in French forms, but the first thing I took out was an egg-beater, and it wouldn't go, so I did the clothes-pin lyric. I call it

### "FIDELITY

"Blow, ye winds,  
I fear ye not;  
Blast, ye simoon,  
Sere and hot!

"Hurricane,  
And cyclone, too,  
Blow, I have no  
Fear of you.

"Lacking beauty,  
Lacking grace,

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Lacking handsome  
Form and face;

"Lacking soul  
And intellect,  
Still I stand up,  
Proud, erect.

"For the Fates  
Have given me  
Wondrous great  
Tenacity.

"And success,  
Both fair and fine,  
Comes to him  
Who holds his line.

"Burrs can stick  
And so can glue—  
Mucilage,  
Stratena, too;

"But there's nothing  
Holds so fast  
As the clothes-pin  
To the last."

"And you gave up the egg-beater altogether?" asked the Poet, restraining a natural inclination to find flaws in the construction of the clothes-pin poem.

"Oh no," said the Idiot. "I knocked off a little quatrain on that. I called it 'The Speedy Egg-Beater,' and it goes like this:



**“‘I SHOULD HESITATE TO TRY TO DRIVE A CAN-AL BOAT’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Great Maude S. can beat all steeds,  
However speedy be their legs;  
But I distance her with ease  
When it comes to beating eggs."

"I really think that you would have done better to give up the egg-beater," said the Poet, grown critical. "I've no patience with one-rhymed quatrains. Now if you had written:

"Great Maude S. can beat all steeds,  
However speedy be their legs;  
But despite her doughty deeds;  
I can beat her beating eggs,

I should not have objected."

"I accept the amendment," replied the Idiot, meekly. "I realized the weakness of the thing myself, and thought of changing it into a couplet, where you only need one rhyme. How's this on a 'Carpet-Tack'?

"However dull the day,  
However dull the skies,  
However dark the night may be,  
My spirits ever rise.

"For though I'm but a carpet-tack,  
Afar from moil and strife,  
No one can ever truly say  
That mine's a pointless life."

"That is very good," said the Poet.



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"I think almost any editor of any comic paper would be willing to pay you three dollars for that. • It is as good as your poem on a ton of coal—simple in its expression and sweet in sentiment."

"I thought you'd think so," said the Idiot. "It struck me so. I've got one on a screw-driver, too, that is very much of the same order, and conveys a moral lesson to the reader who is always reaching out after the unattainable. It reads as follows:

"I cannot tool a tally-ho,  
I cannot drive a nag;  
I dare not hold the ribbons  
On a hack or rumbling drag.

"I could not guide the reins upon  
A simple billy-goat,  
And I should hesitate to try  
To drive a can-al boat.

"But I don't mind these things at all,  
For I can drive a screw,  
And I am happy, for that's just  
What I was meant to do."

"The fourth line of the second verse is weak, but otherwise it's good," commented the Poet. "It's not a *can-al* boat; it's a *can-al* boat, and all the poetic li-



“I HAVEN'T EVER HAD A HOME; I'VE ALWAYS BOARDED”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

cense in the world wouldn't excuse your taking such a liberty with language."

"I appreciate that," said the Idiot. "But I don't see how I could get around it."

"There's only one way," said the Poet. "I think if you omitted that verse altogether you'd improve the poem."

"Then I should have to eliminate the billy-goat," said the Idiot. "That takes a great deal of humor out of it. I always laugh when I encounter a beast like that in poetry; he seems so helpless when incarcerated in a poem."

"That may be," observed the Poet. "But it is my belief that the goat, of all animals in the kingdom, was the last one designed to be used in poetry, anyhow. He is bad enough in prose, and in this case will butt your poem to oblivion if you insist on keeping him in it. Any more?"

"No," said the Idiot; "that's the last."

"Well, you've got a good start," said the Poet, rising to light his pipe, which had gone out. "And if I were you I'd go on and finish the book. 'The Idiot's Book of Household Poetry' would have

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

a great sale. It has but one drawback that I can see. You harp on one string too much. Every one of your poems preaches contentment, satisfaction—nothing else.”

“That,” said the Idiot, “is not an objection, but a virtue; for what other lesson,” he added, with a glance of pride at his surroundings, “what other lesson, my dear Poet, should a home try to teach, and what other sentiment can mean so much to mankind?”

“I don’t know,” said the Poet, with a little sigh. “I haven’t ever had a home; I’ve always boarded.”

Whereupon the Idiot rose up from his chair, and putting his arm about his friend’s shoulder, said:

“How you do talk! Never had a home? Why, my dear fellow, what’s this? It’s yours as long as it’s mine!”

## VIII

### SOME CONSIDERATION OF THE HIRED MAN

“WHO is that sitting down on your tennis-court, Mr. Idiot?” asked Mr. Brief, the lawyer. “Or is it anybody? I’ve been trying for the last half-hour to make out whether it’s a man or one of those iron figures with which some people decorate their lawns.”

“That,” replied the Idiot, calmly, “is my hired man. I pay him forty dollars a month to sit down there and let the grass grow under his feet. I heard you and Mr. Pedagog discussing the wonderful grassiness of my lawn after dinner last night, and I meant to have told you then that the credit thereof belongs entirely to the restful nature of that man’s soul. He will stand for hours rooted to one spot and looking with apparent aimlessness out over the river. To most people this would seem

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

to be prompted by a sheer indisposition to work, but this would do him a rank injustice, for his immovability is due entirely to his system. He is letting the grass grow beneath him, and the fact that our grass is so flourishing everywhere is due to his having stood for hours at various times over every square inch of territory to which I hold the title-deeds."

The Idiot gazed out of the window at his retainer with affectionate admiration.

"He certainly clings closely to his system," said the lawyer.

"He is a model," said the Idiot. "He has done more to make my life here easy than any one in my service. For instance, you know the hurly-burly of existence in town. I go to my office in the morning, and whether I have much work or little to do, I come home in the afternoon absolutely worn out. The constant hustling and bustling of others in the city wears upon my mind, and consequently upon my body. The rush and roar of cables and electric-cars; the activity of messengers running to and fro in the streets; the weary horses dragging great lumbering wagons up and down the crowded



**“‘I FEEL THAT I COULD GO OUT AND MOW THREE ACRES  
OF GRASS’”**





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

thoroughfares, all affect my nature and impair my energy; and then, the day's work done, I return here, where all is quiet and still, and the very contrast between that man, standing silently on his appointed spot, or leaning against the house, or lying off in sheer content under some tree, and the mad scramble for lucre in the city, invigorates my tired body until I feel that I could go out and mow three acres of grass before dinner; in fact, I generally do."

"I did not know that a restful nature was a requisite of a successful career as a hired man," said Mr. Pedagog.

"It is evident, then, that you have never had a hired man," rejoined the Idiot. "Nor can you ever have studied the species at close range. Ceaseless activity would be his ruin. If he did to-day all there is to do, he would be out of employment to-morrow, consequently he never does to-day's work to-day, and cultivates that leisurely attitude towards life upon which you have commented. Do you see that small beech-tree over there?" he added, pointing to a scrawny little sapling whose sole virtue appeared to be its rigid uprightness.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Is that a beech-tree?" asked Mr. Brief. "I thought it was a garden stake."

"It is a beech-tree," said the Idiot. "I planted it myself last autumn, and while it has as yet borne no beeches, I think if we give it time, and it withstands the rigors of the climate, it will produce its fruit. But it was not of its possibilities as a beech-bearing tree that I intended to speak. I wanted to indicate to you by a material object the value of having a hired man who likes to lean against things. At the close of this last winter that tree, instead of being as erect as a grenadier, as it now is, was all askew. The strong westerly winds which are constantly blowing across that open stretch bent the thing until it seemed that the tree was bound to be deformed; but Mike overcame the difficulty. He would go out day after day and sit down beside it and lean against it for two and three hours at a time, with the result that the tendency to curve was overcome, and a tree that I feared was doomed to fail now bids fair to resemble a successful telegraph-pole in its uprightness. And, of course, the added warmth of his body pressing down upon the earth which



**“HE WOULD GO OUT DAY AFTER DAY AND SIT DOWN  
BESIDE IT”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

covers its roots gave it an added impulse to grow."

"It is a wonderful system," smiled Mr. Brief. "I wonder it is not adopted everywhere."

"It is, pretty much," said the Idiot. "Most hired men do the same thing. I don't think Mike differs radically from others of his kind. Of course, there are exceptions. My neighbor Jimpsonberry, for instance, has a man who is so infernally unrestful that he makes everybody tired. He is up every morning mowing Jimpsonberry's lawn at five o'clock, waking up every sleepy soul within ear-shot with the incessant and disturbing clicking of his machine. Mike would never think of making such a nuisance of himself. Furthermore, Jimpsonberry's lawn is kept so close-cropped that the grass doesn't get any chance, and in the heat of midsummer turns to a dull brick-red."

After a pause, during which the company seemed to be deeply cogitating the philosophical bearing of the subject under discussion, the Idiot resumed:

"There is another aspect of this matter," he said, "which Jimpsonberry's man brings to my mind. You know as well as

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

I do that heat is contagious. If you feel as cool as a cucumber, and then all of a sudden see somebody who is dripping with perspiration and looking for all the world like a human kettle simmering on a kitchen-range, you begin to simmer yourself. It is mere sympathy, of course, but you simmer just the same, get uncomfortable and hot in the collar, and are shortly as badly off as the other fellow. So it is with Jimpsonberry's man. Time and time again he has spoiled all my pleasure by making me realize by a glance at his red face and sweating arms how beastly hot it is, when before I had seen him I felt tolerably comfortable. Mike, on the other hand, is not so inconsiderate, and I am confident would let the grass grow a mile high before he would consent to interfere with my temperature by pushing the mower up and down the lawn on a humid day."

"Do you keep this interesting specimen of still life all through the year?" asked Mr. Brief, "or do you give him a much-needed vacation in winter? I should think he would be worn out with all this standing around, for nothing that I know of is more tiresome than doing nothing."



“HE SHOVELS OFF A FOOT-PATH”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"No," said the Idiot. "Mike never seems to need a vacation. Sitting down and leaning against things and standing around don't seem to tire him in the least. It might tire you or me, but you see he's used to it. The only effect it has on him, as I view the matter, is that it wears out his clothes. It doesn't impair his lack of vigor at all. So by the simple act of occasionally renewing his wardrobe, which I do every time I discard a suit of my own, I revive his wasted vitality, and he does not require to be sent to Europe, or to take an extended tour in the White Mountains to recuperate. I keep him all through the winter, and his system is quite the same then as in summer, except that he does his sitting around and leaning indoors instead of in the open."

"I suppose he looks after the furnace and keeps the walks clear of snow in winter time?" suggested Mr. Pedagog, who was beginning to take an interest in this marvellously restful personage.

"Yes," said the Idiot; "and he attends to the windows as well. As a minder of the furnace he is invaluable. My house is as cool as a roof-garden all through the winter, and thanks to his unwillingness to

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

over-exert himself shovelling coal into the furnace, I burn only about half as much as my neighbors, and my house is never overheated. This in itself is an indication of the virtue of Mike's method. One-half of the colds contracted by children nowadays are the result of overheated houses. Mike's method gives me a cool house at very moderate expense, owing to the great saving of coal, the children do not get colds because of overheating, and the expense of having a doctor every other day is averted. Then his snow-shovelling scheme goes back to the first principles of nature. Mike is not overawed by convention, and instead of following the steps of other men who shovel the snow entirely off, he shovels off a footpath to enable me to go to business, and then sits down and oversees the sun while it melts the balance. Sometimes, if the sun does not do the work promptly enough to suit him, he gets up little contests for the children. He divides up certain portions of the walk into equal parts, and starts the small boys on a race to see which one will get the portion assigned to him cleaned off first, the prize being something in the nature of an apple, which the cook orders from the market. I

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

believe my son Thomas won ten apples last winter, although I am told that the Jimpsonberry boy, whose father's man is cross, and insists on doing all the work himself, is the champion snow-shoveller of the street."

"Yes, he is, pa," put in Tommy. "Mike owes him 'leven apples. I only won eight."

"Well, that is a very good record, Thomas," said the Idiot, "and I will see to it that next winter you have a brand-new snow-shovel with which to enter the contest."

"Mike lets us chop the kindling-wood, too," said Tommy, suddenly perceiving a chance to put in a good word for the genial Mike. "I think he's the nicest hired man as ever was."

"He'll stop anything he's doing to talk to me," ventured Mollie, not wishing to be backward in laying wreaths upon the brow of their friend.

"Yes, I have noticed that," said the Idiot. "Indeed, next to his extreme restfulness there is no quality that I know of in Mike that shines out so conspicuously as his intense love for children. He will neglect his own interests, as Mollie has

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

suggested, to talk to the little ones, and I rather like him for it. No boy dares go near the Jimpsonberry man, who has exerted himself into a perpetual state of nervous exhaustion."

"Well, if he cleans your windows, that is something," observed Mrs. Pedagog, whose experience in keeping a boarding-house years before entitled her to speak as one having authority.

"Unless his system is the same in that work as in the other branches committed to his care," said Mr. Brief.

"It isn't quite," said the Idiot. "He really does exert himself in window-cleaning. I have frequently seen him spend a whole day on one window. His window-washing system is a very ingenious one, nevertheless."

"It is, indeed," said Mrs. Idiot, with a show of feeling.

"A new window-washing system?" grinned Mr. Pedagog.

"Yes," said the Idiot. "It is his own invention. He washes them on the outside in summer and on the inside in winter. The result is this opalescent glass which you see. You would hardly guess that these windows are of French plate.



“‘SPEND A WHOLE DAY ON ONE WINDOW’”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Still, we don't mind so much. I couldn't ask him to wash them on the outside in winter, it is so dreadfully cold, and in the summer, of course, they are always open, and no one, unless he were disagreeable enough to go snooping about after unpleasant details, would notice that they are not immaculate."

"And you pay this man forty dollars for this?" demanded Mr. Brief.

"Oh, for this and other things. I pay him two dollars a month for the work he does. I pay him ten dollars a month because he's good to the children. I pay him ten dollars more for his civility, which is unvarying—he always puts his hat on when he comes into the house, having noticed, perhaps, that only those who are my social equals are entitled to appear bareheaded in my presence."

"And the other eighteen?" persisted the lawyer, by nature a cross-examiner.

"Well, I don't grudge him that because—" a sort of a fond light lit up the Idiot's eyes as he gazed down upon Mike, still sitting on the tennis-court—"I don't grudge him that other eighteen dollars because it costs Mike twenty dollars a month to live; and he uses the rest of it to put his



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

boy through college, so that when he grows up to be a man he will be something more than a hired man."

"Ah!" said Mr. Brief.

"Yes," said the Idiot; "I found that out from a third party some time ago, and I thought after all I'd keep him, for I know nobody else would have him, and then what would become of the boy in college?"

## IX

### ON SOCIAL ACCOUNTS

"It's rather strange, I think," observed Mrs. Idiot one evening, as she and the Idiot sat down to dine, "that the Dawkinses haven't been here for three or four months."

"I've noticed it myself," said the Idiot. "We used to see 'em every day about. What's up? You and Polly Dawkins had a fight?"

"Not that I know of," said Mrs. Idiot. "The last time we met she was very cordial, and asked most affectionately after you and the children. I presumed that possibly you and Dick had had some kind of a falling out."

"Not a bit of it. Dick and I couldn't quarrel any more than you and Polly could. Perhaps as we grow older our ideals differ. Polly's rather anthropological in her talks, isn't she?"

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"A trifle," said Mrs. Idiot. "And musical and literary and scientific."

"While you?" queried the Idiot.

"Well, I'm fond of golf and—ah—well—"

"Golf again," laughed the Idiot. "I guess that's it, Bess. When a woman wants to talk about the origin of the species and has to hear about a splendid putt, and her observations upon the sonata are invariably interrupted by animadversions upon the morals of caddies, and her criticisms of Browning end in a discussion of the St. Andrew's Rules, she's apt to shy off into a more congenial atmosphere, don't you think?"

"I am sure," retorted Mrs. Idiot, "that while I admit I am more interested in golf than in anything else outside of you and the children, I can and do talk sometimes of other things than caddies, and beautiful drives, and stymies. You are very much mistaken if you think otherwise."

"That is very true, my dear," said the Idiot. "And nobody knows it better than I do. I've heard you talk charmingly about lots of things besides stymies, and fozzles, and putts, and drives, but you don't know anything about the men of the



“‘WELL, I’M FOND OF GOLF’”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Stone Age, and you couldn't tell the difference between a sonata and a fugue any more than I. Furthermore, you have no patience with Browning, so that when Polly Dawkins asks if you like *Sordello*, you are more likely than not to say that you never ate any, but on the whole for small fish prefer whitebait."

Mrs. Idiot laughed.

"No, indeed," she replied. "I'd fall back on golf if Polly mentioned *Sordello* to me. You may remember that you sent it to me when we were engaged, and I loved you so much—then—that I read it. If I hadn't loved you I couldn't have done it."

"Well," smiled the Idiot, "what did you think of it?"

"I think Browning had a good lie, but he fozzled," said Mrs. Idiot, with her eyes atwinkle, and the Idiot subsided for at least ten seconds.

"I wish you'd say that to Polly some time," he observed. "It's so very true, and put with an originality which cannot but appeal to the most hardened of literary women."

"I will if I ever get the chance," said Mrs. Idiot.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Suppose we make the chance?" suggested the Idiot. "Let's go down there and call to-night. I'll work the conversation up so that you can get that off as an impromptu."

"No," said Mrs. Idiot. "I don't think we'd better. In the first place, Mrs. Whalker told me yesterday that Polly is to read a paper on Balzac before the S. F. M. E. to-morrow evening, and on Friday morning she is to discuss the 'Influence of Mozart on De Koven' before the Musical Mothers' Meeting, and on Saturday afternoon she is going to have an anthropological tea at her house, which she is to open with some speculations as to whether in the Glacial Period dudes were addicted to the use of cigarettes."

"Great Scott!" said the Idiot. "This is her busy week."

"Tolerably so," said Mrs. Idiot. "She has probably reserved this evening to read up on Balzac for to-morrow's essay, so I think, my dear, we'd better not go."

"Right as usual," said the Idiot. And then he added, "Poor Dawkins, who is taking care of him now?"

"I think," said Mrs. Idiot, "that possibly Mrs. Dawkins has sublet the con-



**"AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL TEA"**





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

tract for looking after her husband and children to the United States Housekeeping Company Limited."

The Idiot gazed blankly at his wife, and awaited an explanation.

"An organization, my dear," she continued, "formed by a number of well-meaning and remorseful widows who, having lost their husbands, begin to appreciate their virtues, and who, finding themselves sympathetic when it is too late, are devoting themselves to the husbands of others who are neglected. A subscription of five hundred dollars will secure the supervision of all the domestic arrangements of a home—marketing, engagement and discharge of domestics, house-cleaning, buttons sewed on, darning done, care of flowers, wifely duties generally; for one thousand dollars they will bring up the children, and see that the baby is rocked to sleep every night, and suitably interested in elevating narratives and poems like Joseph's coat of many colors, and Tom, Tom the Piper's Son. This enables an advanced woman like Mrs. Dawkins to devote her mornings to the encyclopedias, her afternoons to the public libraries, and her evenings to the functions

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

whereat she may read the papers which her devotion to the encyclopedias and the libraries has brought forth."

"Excuse me, my dear Bess," said the Idiot, rising. "I wish to telephone Dr. Simmons."

"For what—for whom?" demanded the lady.

"You, of course," returned the Idiot. "You are developing alarming symptoms. You give every indication of a bad attack of professional humor. Your 'International Widows Company for the Protection and Amelioration of Neglected Husbandry' proves that!"

Mrs. Idiot laughed again.

"Oh, I didn't say that there really is such an institution!" she cried. "I said that I supposed there was, for if there isn't, poor Dick Dawkins isn't taken care of at all."

"Well, I'm sorry for it all, anyhow," said the Idiot, seriously. "They're both of 'em good friends of ours, and I hate to see two families that have been so close drawing apart."

Just then Mollie and Tommy came in.

"Mamma, Willie Dawkins says he can't come to our party because his ma won't



“THE BABY IS ROCKED TO SLEEP EVERY NIGHT”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

let him," said Mollie. "She says we don't never go down there."

"That's it," said the Idiot. "Mrs. Dawkins has got so many irons in the fire she's begun to keep social books. I'll bet you she's got a ledger and a full set of double-entry account-books charging up calls payable and calls receivable."

"I don't see how she can get along unless she has," replied Mrs. Idiot. "With all her clubs and church societies and varied social obligations she needs an expert accountant to keep track of them all."

"I suppose a promise to read a paper on Balzac," put in the Idiot, "is something like a three-months' note. It's easy to promise to pay, with three months in which to prepare, but you've got to keep track of the date and meet the obligation when it falls due. As for me, I'd rather meet the note."

"That is about it," said Mrs. Idiot. "If a woman goes into society properly she's got to make a business of it. For instance, there are about ten dances given at the club here every year. Polly is patroness for every one of 'em. There are twenty-five teas during the spring and summer months. Polly assists at half of

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

them, and gives a fifth of them. She's president of the King's Daughters, corresponding secretary of the Dorcas, treasurer of the Red Cross Society, and goodness knows what all!"

"I can quite understand why she needs to keep accounts—social accounts," said the Idiot. "But it's rather queer, don't you think, that she has the children on her books? The idea of saying that Jimmie and Gladys can't come to Mollie's party because Mollie hasn't been down there—why, it's nonsense!"

"No," said Mrs. Idiot, "it is merely logical. Whatever Polly Dawkins does she tries to do thoroughly. I've no doubt she'll do Balzac up completely. If she keeps social books showing call balances in her favor or against herself she might as well go the whole thing and write the children in—only she's made a mistake, as far as we are concerned, unless she means to write us off without squaring up."

"You talk like a financier," said the Idiot, admiringly. "What do you know about writing off?"

"I used to help my father with his accounts, occasionally," said Mrs. Idiot. "Polly Dawkins's books ought to show a



“POOR DICK DAWKINS ISN'T TAKEN CARE OF  
AT ALL”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

balance of one call in our favor. That's really the reason I'm not willing to call there to-night. She's so queer about it all, and, as a matter of fact, she owes me a call. I'm not going to overwhelm her with an added obligation."

"Ho!" smiled the Idiot. "You keep books yourself, eh?"

"I keep score," said Mrs. Idiot. "I learned that playing golf."

"It's a bad thing to keep score in golf," said the Idiot.

"So they say, but I find it amusing," she replied.

"And how many calls does Mrs. Wilkins owe you?" demanded the Idiot.

"I don't know," returned the wife.

"And I don't care. When I want to see Mrs. Wilkins I call on her whether she owes me a call or not, but with Polly Dawkins it's different. She began the book-keeping, and as long as she likes it I must try to live up to her ideas. If social intercourse develops into a business, business requirements must be observed."

"It's a good idea in a way," said the Idiot, reflectively. "But if you make a business of society, why don't you carry it to a logical conclusion? Balance your

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

books, if you mean business, every month, and send your debtors a statement of their account."

"Well, I will if you wish me to," said Mrs. Idiot. "Suppose they don't pay?"

"Dun 'em," said the Idiot. And then the matter dropped.

On the fifth of the following month Mr. and Mrs. Idiot were seated comfortably in their library. The children had gone to bed, and they were enjoying the bliss of a quiet evening at home, when the door-bell rang, and in a moment or two the maid ushered in Mr. and Mrs. Richard Dawkins, preceded, of course, by their cards. The young householders were delighted, and Polly Dawkins was never more charming. She looked well, and she talked well, and there was not a symptom of any diminution of the old-time friendship perceptible—only she did appear to be tired and care-worn.

The evening wore away pleasantly. The chat reverted to old times, and by degrees Mrs. Dawkins seemed to grow less tired.

About ten o'clock the Idiot invited his neighbor to adjourn to the smoking-room, where they each lit a cigar and indulged in a companionable glass.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Idiot," said Dawkins, when his wife called out to him that it was time to go home, "your wife is a wonder. I've been trying for three months to make Polly come up here and she wouldn't. Keeps books, you know—now. Has to—so much to do. Thought you owed us a call, but received your bill Wednesday—looked it up—questioned servants—found you were right."

"Bill," cried the Idiot. "What bill?"

"Why, the one Mrs. Idiot sent—this," said Dawkins, taking a piece of paper out of his pocket. "Confoundedly good joke."

The Idiot took up the piece of paper. It was type-written—on Tommy's machine—and read as follows:

November 1, 1898			
MR. AND MRS. RICHARD DAWKINS			
<i>To Mr. and Mrs. Idiot Dr.</i>			
September 20	Evening call	1	
	Account overdue. Please remit.		

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Great Scott!" laughed the Idiot.

"My dear," said the Idiot after the Dawkinses had gone, "that bill of yours was a great idea."

"It wasn't my idea at all—it was yours," said Mrs. Idiot, laughing. "You said we ought to be business-like to the last and send out a statement on the first of the month. I sent it. And they paid up."

"Richard," said Mrs. Dawkins, as they drove home, "did you get a receipt?"

## X

### AS TO SANTA CLAUS

"I AM very glad I didn't take Tommy and Mollie to church with me this morning," said Mrs. Idiot, on her return from service. "It would have broken their hearts to have heard the sermon. I don't know what gets into Dr. Preachly sometimes. He gave us a blast about Santa Claus."

"A blast about Santa Claus, eh!" said the Idiot. "And how did he blast the good old saint?"

"He said he was a lie," rejoined Mrs. Idiot, indignantly, "and that it was the duty of every Christian in the land to see that the lie was exposed."

"Great heavens!" cried the Idiot, in astonishment. "Doesn't Dr. Preachly believe in Santa Claus? Poor old Preachly! How much he has lost! Did he say

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

anything about Hop o' My Thumb and Cinderella?"

"No, of course not. Why should he?" returned Mrs. Idiot.

"Oh, because; I suppose that a man who doesn't believe in Santa Claus is a skeptic on the subject of Hop o' My Thumb, and Rumpelstiltzken, and Cinderella, and Jack the Giant-Killer, and all the rest of that noble army of childhood friends," explained the Idiot.

"He didn't mention them," said Mrs. Idiot. "He—"

"He's going to preach a series of sermons on lies, I presume," said the Idiot. "He's tackled Santa Claus first, as being the most seasonable of the lot, eh? Jack the Giant-Killer ought to be a good subject for a ministerial attack."

"Well, he pulled poor old Santa Claus to pieces," said Mrs. Idiot, with a sigh.

"Why didn't you bring me a piece of him as a souvenir?" demanded the Idiot. "Just a lock of his hair for my collection of curios? What was done with the remains?"

Mrs. Idiot laughed as she pulled over her gloves and smoothed them upon her lap.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"There weren't any remains," she answered. "When Dr. Preachly got through with him there wasn't a vestige of the old chap left. To begin with, he was a lie, the doctor said. Then he went on and showed that he was a wickedly partial old fellow—a very snob, he called him—because he gives fine things to the children of the rich and little or nothing to the children of the poor. He filled the little folk with hope and brought them disappointment, and so on. It was a powerful sermon, although I wanted to weep over it."

"Go ahead and weep," said the Idiot; "it's the appropriate thing to do. I don't wonder you wanted to cry; you've always liked Dr. Preachly."

"Of course," said Mrs. Idiot.

"And you hate to see him make a—ah—a—well, you know—of himself in the pulpit; and I quite agree with you. I rather like Preachly myself. It is too bad to see a well-meaning man like that batting his brains out against the rock of Gibraltar, whether suicide is sin or not. What has put him in this despondent mood? Do you suppose he has heard?"

"Heard what?" demanded Mrs. Idiot.



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"About the slippers," said the Idiot.

"What slippers?" asked his wife.

"Oh, the same old slippers," said the Idiot. "You know the ones I mean—the ones he's going to get from Santa Claus. Really, I'm not surprised, after all. If I were a minister, and realized that truck-loads of embroidered slippers of every size and color, covered with stags of red worsted jumping over rivulets of yellow floss, with split agates for eyes set in over the toe, were to be dumped in my front yard every Christmas Eve by that old reprobate, Santa Claus, I think I, too, would set him down as a fraud, or an overworked cobbler, anyhow."

"That's exaggerated—a comic-paper idea," said Mrs. Idiot. "I don't believe the average clergyman gets so many slippers. Dr. Preachly only got eight pairs last Christmas."

"Is that all?" cried the Idiot. "Mercy, what a small income of slippers! Dear me! how can he live with only eight pairs of slippers? But, after all, slippers are an appropriate gift for a clergyman," he added, "and Santa Claus should be credited with that fact. Slippers have soles, and the more slippers he gets the



“DR. PREACHLY ONLY GOT EIGHT PAIRS LAST XMAS”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

easier it is to save their soles, and therefore—”

“Really, my dear, you are flippant,” said Mrs. Idiot.

“Not at all,” rejoined the Idiot. “I am merely trying to sit on two stools at once—to retain my respect for Dr. Preachly without giving up my everlasting regard for Santa Claus. If I can’t do both I am very much afraid it will be Dr. Preachly, and not Santa Claus, who will go to the wall in this establishment, and that would be sad. I can’t say I think much of the doctor’s logic. Do you?”

“I didn’t notice his logic,” Mrs. Idiot replied.

“Very likely,” said the Idiot; “from what you tell me of his discourse I imagine he must have left it at home, which is a bad thing to do in an argument. To begin, he called Santa a lie, did he?”

“Yes; said he didn’t exist at all.”

“Good! Then how could he have been a snob?”

“Why, while of course I have no sympathy with his conclusions, Dr. Preachly handled that point pretty well. It certainly is true that in the homes of the rich there is a lavishness of gifts that you don’t

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

find in the homes of the poor, and therefore Santa Claus treats the rich better than he does the poor. We all know that."

"Hum!" said the Idiot. "And so it is Santa Claus who is the snob, eh, and not Fortune?"

"Well, Dr. Preachly did not touch upon that. All he said was that Santa Claus was a snob for favoring 'high society' and in many cases absolutely ignoring the submerged."

"But I don't see how," said the Idiot.

"Suppose he brings a diamond necklace to the daughter of a Cræsus?"

"Precisely," said the Idiot.

"And a china doll to the daughter of a carpenter?" said Mrs. Idiot.

"That's tact, not snobbishness," said the Idiot. "What would the daughter of a carpenter do with a diamond necklace? The china doll is not only more appropriate, but a better plaything."

"Well, anyhow, he gives richly to those that have, and sparsely, if at all, to those that haven't, Dr. Preachly said," said Mrs. Idiot.

"There is scriptural authority for that," observed the Idiot. "I wonder if Dr. Preachly reads his Bible! Perhaps I'd



**“A CHINA DOLL TO THE DAUGHTER OF A  
CARPENTER”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

better send him one for Christmas instead of a pair of galoshes. He'll find in the Bible that 'to him that hath shall be given,' and so forth. But to return to the logic—"

"I told you I didn't notice it," said Mrs. Idiot.

"Nor did Dr. Preachly, my dear; passed it by as if it were a poor relation, apparently. But this is true, a lie is an untruth. Truth alone lives, therefore an untruth does not live. Santa Claus is a lie and does not live, and is a snob, according to our reverend logician. Now, how can one who does not live be a snob or anything else? Truly, I wish Dr. Preachly would be more careful in his statements. As a pew-holder in his church I do not like to hear him denounce something that does not exist as having unworthy qualities. It's like shaking a sword at nothing and patting yourself on the back afterwards for your courage; still more in this instance is it like batting your poor mortal head against the hard surface of an everlasting rock, and our clergy should be in better business.

"Let 'em fight the harmful lies—the lies of false social ideas as propagated by



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

distinctions of pew-holding, for instance. The man who sits in the front of the church is no better than the man who sits at the back, and is frequently his inferior; but has he more or has he less influence? The man who hands in his check for ten thousand dollars, having that and more to spare, is not more the friend of religion and Christianity than the poor beggar who stumbles in and puts his penny in the plate, thus diminishing by one-fifth his capital. Suppose Santa Claus is in a material sense a fancy or a lie; Heaven help Dr. Preachly if he can't see the beauty and the ethical value of the deception. Is he not the embodiment of the golden rule, and is he not, after all—God bless him and them!—something beautiful in the eyes of the children?"

"I'm flippant, and I know it, but there are some things I cling to," he added, after a pause. "Santa Claus is one of them, and Dr. Preachly can preach through all eternity, and, with all due respect to him, he can't remove from my mind the beauty of an idea that was planted there by two people who were practical enough, my father and my mother. I've inherited Santa Claus, and I'm not going



**“‘HULLO, SONNY! HAD A GOOD TIME?’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

to give him up, and no preacher in our church or in the church of others can take him away from me by one sermon, or by an infinite number of sermons, however sincere they may be. Is dinner ready?"

Dinner was ready. It was eaten reflectively, and after it the children went to Sunday-school. From this Tommy returned with a swollen eye, which later became dark.

"Hullo, pop!" he said, addressing the Idiot as he entered the house.

"Hullo, sonny!" replied the Idiot, observing the swollen eye. "Had a good time?"

"Yep," said the boy; "pretty good."

"Been fighting?" suggested the Idiot.

"Not so very much," said the boy; "only a little." And he began to sing a popular air, as if he didn't care much about life in general, and didn't mind an aching eye, which was rapidly, by its inflammation, giving away the fact that he had met with trouble.

"What did you learn at Sunday-school?" asked the Idiot.

"More blessed to give than to receive," said Tommy.

"Good!" said the Idiot. "I hope you

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

will remember that, sonny. There is no satisfaction in all the world like that of giving if you can afford it."

"I think tho, too," said Mollie, sitting down on her father's lap with the contented sigh of a little girl who has discovered that life is not all an illusion. "I gave my dollie away to-day, papa," she added. "She wath only thawdust, and Pollie Harrington hath her now. She was a drefful care, and I'm glad to be ridden of her."

But the Idiot's mind was not on dolls, and he showed it. His boy's eye proved a greater care.

"Come here, my boy," he said.

The boy approached inquiringly.

"How did this happen?" the Idiot asked. "Your eye is swollen."

"Oh, I don't know," cried Tommy, exultantly. "Jimmie Roberts said there wasn't no Santy Claus."

"Well?"

"I said there was, an' then I gave him one on the end of his nose."

Here the boy struggled away from his father, as if he had done something he was willing to stand by.

"Let me understand this," said the Idiot. "Jimmie said—"



**“‘I GAVE MY DOLLY AWAY TO-DAY’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"There wasn't any Santy Claus," interrupted Tommy.

"Then what did you say?" asked the Idiot.

"I told him he didn't know what he was talking about," said Tommy.

"Why did you say that?"

"Because he was wrong, papa," said Tommy. "I've seen Santy Claus; I saw him last year."

"Ah! You did, eh? I was not aware of that fact."

Tommy began to laugh.

"You can't fool me, daddy," he said, climbing onto his father's knee. "Of course I've seen him, and he's the bulliest feller in all the world. *You're him!*"

And a hug followed.

Later on Mrs. Idiot and the Idiot sat together. The latter was deep in thought.

"Children have queer notions," said he, after a while.

"They are generally pretty right, though," observed Mrs. Idiot. "You are a pretty good Santa Claus, after all," she added.

"Pollie," said the Idiot, rising, "I believe in Santa Claus because he represents the spirit of the hour, and whoever tries to



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

turn him down tries to turn down that spirit—the most blessed thing we have. Let's keep the children believing in Santa Claus, eh?"

"I agree," said Mrs. Idiot. "For the secret is out. You are Santa Claus to them."

"Heaven grant I may always be as much," said the Idiot. "For if a father is Santa Claus, and a boy or a girl believes in Santa Claus as a friend, as a companion, as something that brings them only sincerity and love and sympathy, then may we feel that Tiny Tim's prayer has been answered, and that God has blessed us all."

## XI

### AS TO NEW-YEAR'S DAY

IT was New-Year's eve, and Mr. and Mrs. Idiot with their old friends were watching the old year die. The old year had been a fairly successful one for them all, and they were properly mournful over its prospective demise, but the promise of the new was sufficiently bright to mitigate their sorrow.

"What a sandwich life is, after all!" ejaculated the Idiot.

Mr. Pedagog started nervously. The remark was so idiotic that even its source seemed to make it inexcusable.

"I don't quite catch your drift," said he.

"As the man said when an avalanche of snow fell off his neighbor's roof and missed him by an inch," said the Idiot. "Why, just think a moment, Doctor, and my drift will overwhelm you. Look about

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

you and consider what we have ourselves demonstrated to-night. If that does not prove life a series of emotional sandwiches, then I don't know what a sandwich is. Twenty minutes ago we were all gladness over the prosperity of the year gone by. Five minutes ago we were all on the verge of tears because the good old year is going the way of all years. An hour from now we will be joyously acclaiming the new. Two thick slices of joy with a thin slice of grief between."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pedagog. "I see. There is something in the analogy, after all. The bread of joy and the ham of sorrow, as you might put it, do make up the sum of human existence; but in some cases, my lad, I am afraid you will find there is only one slice of bread to two of ham."

"No doubt," replied the Idiot, "but that does not affect my proposition that life is a sandwich. If one slice of ham between two slices of bread is a ham sandwich, why is not one slice of bread between two slices of ham a bread sandwich? What is a sandwich, anyhow? The dictionary says that a sandwich is something placed between two other things; hence,



**“I DON'T QUITE CATCH YOUR DRIFT”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

all things are sandwiches, because there is nothing in the world, the world being round, that is not between two other things. Therefore, all things being sandwiches, life is a sandwich, Q. E. D."

"Is life a thing?" demanded Mr. Pedagog.

"Certainly," said the Idiot. "And a mighty good thing, too. If you don't believe it look the word thing up in the dictionary. All things are things."

"But," continued the Schoolmaster, his old spirit of antagonism rising up in his breast, "granted that life is a thing, what is it between so that it becomes a sandwich?"

"The past and the future," said the Idiot. "It is a slice of the immediate between a slice of past and one of future."

Mr. Pedagog laughed.

"You are still the same old Idiot," he said.

"Yes," said the Idiot. "Gibraltar and I and Truth are the three unchangeable things in this life, and that's why I am so happy. I'm in such good company. Gibraltar and Truth are good enough companions for anybody."

Meanwhile Mollie and Tommy, who

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

had been allowed to sit up upon this rare occasion, stirred uneasily.

"Ith I a thandwich, popper?" said the little girl, sleepily, raising her head from her father's shoulder and gazing into his eyes.

"Yes, indeed, you are," said her father, giving her an affectionate squeeze. "A sugar sandwich, Mollie. You're really good enough to eat."

"Well, I'd rather be a pie," put in Tommy; "an apple pie."

"Very well, my son," returned the Idiot. "Have your own way. Henceforth be a pie if you prefer—an apple pie. But may I ask why you express this preference?"

"Oh, because," said Tommy, "if I'm to be an apple pie somebody's got to fill me chock-full of apple sauce."

"The son of his father," observed Mr. Whitechoker.

"I think it is a pity," Mrs. Pedagog put in at this point, "that some of the good old customs of the New Year have gone out."

"As to which, Mrs. Pedagog?" asked the Idiot.

"Well, New-Year's calling particular-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ly," explained the lady. "It is no longer the thing for people to make New-Year's calls, and I must confess I regret it. It used to be a great pleasure to me in the old days to receive the gentlemen—my old friends, and relatives, and boarders."

"Why distinguish between your old friends and your boarders, Mrs. Pedagog?" interrupted the Idiot. "They are synonymous terms."

"They are now," said the good lady, "but—ah—they weren't always. I used sometimes to think you, for instance, didn't like me as much as you might."

"I didn't dare," explained the Idiot. "If I'd liked you as much as I might I'd have told you so, and then Mr. Pedagog would have got jealous and there'd have been a horrid affair."

The lady smiled graciously, and Mr. Pedagog threw a small paper pellet at the Idiot.

"I'm much obliged to you for holding off, Idiot," he said. "I don't know where I'd have been to-day if you'd got in ahead of me. Mrs. Pedagog has always had a soft spot in her heart for you."

"I've got the other spot," said the Idiot, "and a pair of aces are hard to beat in



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

pairs; but I think I voice Mrs. Pedagog's sentiments in the matter, Mr. Pedagog, when I say that she and I would always have been glad to see you every other New-Year's day if I had been the fortunate winner of her hand."

"And Mr. Pedagog and I would have been glad to see you and Mrs. Pedagog in the sandwich years," said Mrs. Idiot to her husband; and then, turning to the Schoolmaster, added, "Wouldn't we, Mr. Pedagog?"

"No, madame," returned Mr. Pedagog, courteously. "You might have been, but I would not. If I had married you I could never have seen any one else with pleasure. I should have kept my eyes solely for you."

"John!" cried Mrs. Pedagog, arching her eyebrows.

"Pleasantry, my dear—mere pleasantry," returned the Schoolmaster, tapping his fingers together and smiling sweetly upon Mrs. Idiot.

"You didn't finish, Mrs. Pedagog," said the Idiot. "You were telling us how you used to enjoy New-Year's calling before it went out."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Pedagog. "It



**“I FELT AS IF I HAD SWALLOWED AN OVERSHOE”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

was charming. I used positively to look forward to its coming with delight. We women, Mr. Idiot, found the old custom very delightful."

"But the men, Mrs. Pedagog," said the Idiot, "did you ever think of them?"

"What else did we think of? What else is there for a woman to think about?" replied Mrs. Pedagog.

"Jane!" cried Mr. Pedagog.

"*Pleasantry, my dear—mere pleasantry,*" returned Mrs. Pedagog, frigidly. And Mr. Pedagog lit a cigar. It is not always pleasant to be quoted.

"Still," said the Idiot, "you thought of men only as creatures of the moment—"

"Entirely," said Mrs. Pedagog.

"And not as creatures of the week following," said the Idiot.

"What has that to do with it?" asked Mrs. Pedagog.

"Much—from the man's stand-point," returned the Idiot. "His digestion was butchered to make a woman's holiday. Take myself as an example. I used to make New-Year's calls; and to get through with my list by midnight, I had to start in at nine o'clock in the morning."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Nine o'clock is not so early," said Mr. Whitechoker.

"It's early for cake and pickled oysters," said the Idiot. "And for chicken salad and wedding-cake, and for lemonade and punch, and for lobster and egg-nog, and for ice-cream and *pâté-de-foie-gras*."

"H'm!" said Mr. Pedagog, reflectively. "That's true."

"Quite so," observed Mr. Whitechoker, brushing off his vest, upon which the ashes of his cigar had rested. "Especially for the punch."

"There was no punch in my house," said Mrs. Pedagog. "Indeed, I always served a very simple luncheon. We did have chicken salad, of course, but the chicken was good and the salad was crisp—"

"I'd swear to it," said the Idiot.

"And we had egg-nog, but there was more egg than nog in it—"

"Again I'd swear to it," said the Idiot, smacking his lips.

"And as for the lobsters, nobody ever complained—"

"He'd have been a lobster himself who would," said the Idiot. "But that does not prove that no one ever suffered."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

“And as for the pickled oysters, no one ever suffered from them that I knew of,” continued the good lady. “They are harmless eaten in moderation.”

“Exactly right,” cried the Idiot. “No gentleman would ever complain of pickled oysters, even if they were made of inferior rubber, eaten in moderation. Yet I recall in my own experience a pickled oyster of most impressive quality. He was not a pickled oyster of the moment. He was the Admiral Dewey of pickled oysters. In appearance he resembled every other pickled oyster I ever met, but—well, he kept me in a state of worry for a month. Just eating him alone was eating pickled oysters in immoderation. I felt as if I had swallowed an overshoe. He was a charming pickled oyster, Mrs. Pedagog, and he was devoted to me, but he involved me in complications alongside of which the Philippine question is child’s play. If a New-Year’s caller could have confined his attentions to the ladies he met no harm would have come to him, but he couldn’t, you know. The day was one continuous round of effort and indigestibles. What a man got at your house and had to eat merely to show his appreciation

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

of your hospitality was all right and wholesome. Your lobster and egg-nog could do him no harm, but he couldn't stop with yours; he had to continue, and consume lobsters and egg-nog everywhere else and all day long. The day resolved itself into a magnificent gorge alongside of which that of Niagara seems like a wagon-rut. It finally came down to the point where either man or the custom had to die, and man being selfish, the custom went. Did you ever consider exactly how much indigestible food an amiable, well-meaning person had to consume in a round of, say, three dozen calls, Mrs. Pedagog?"

Mr. Brief nodded his approval. "Now you've struck it," he said. "I've been there, Idiot."

"I must confess," said Mrs. Pedagog, "that I never looked into that question."

"Well, I'll tell you," the Idiot resumed. "The last time I made New-Year's calls I figured it out for the doctor the next morning, and as I recall the statistics, in the course of that day I ate one hundred and twenty-nine pickled oysters, thirteen plates of chicken salad, seven plates of lobster salad, five plates of mulled sardines, twenty-three plates of



**“I FOUND EIGHT SANDWICHES AND A PINT OF  
SALTED ALMONDS.”**





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ice-cream, four hundred and sixty-three macaroons, eighty-seven sandwiches ranging from lettuce and ham to chicken and potted goose-liver, enough angel-cake to feed all the angels there are and two more, sixteen Welsh rarebits that were being made just as I happened in, and crystallized ginger and salted almonds and marrons to the extent of about eighteen pounds."

"Mercy!" cried Mrs. Pedagog.

"Say, pa, where was I then?" asked Tommy, his eyes glittering with delight.

"You were eating green cheese on the moon, Tommy," said the Idiot.

"Wisht I'd been with you," said Tommy. "Must o' been better than bein' a pie."

"And all of these things," continued the Idiot, with a wink at his son, "I washed down with six gallons of lemonade, nineteen cups of coffee, eighteen cups of tea, and a taste of claret punch."

"And how about the egg-nog?" asked the Bibliomaniac, slyly.

"I judge there were about six crates of eggs in it," said the Idiot. "I never had the nerve to estimate the nog-end of it."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"What did the doctor say when you told him all that?" asked Mrs. Pedagog.

The Idiot chuckled. "What did he say?" he cried. "Why, I should think you could guess. He blamed it all on the Welsh rarebits, but he thought he could get me into shape again in time for the next New Year. I've never been the same man since."

"Well, the way I look at it," said Mrs. Pedagog, "is that it is a great pity that women must be deprived of a function that gives them pleasure because the men make pigs of themselves."

"But you don't understand, Mrs. Pedagog," the Idiot persisted. "I grant you that the man who eats all that makes a pig of himself, but he has no choice. He can't help himself. When a charming hostess insists, he'd be a greater pig if he refused to partake of her hospitality. The custom involved an inevitable sacrifice of man's digestion upon the altar of woman. That's all there was about it. If it could have been arranged so that a man could take a hamper about with him and stow all the cakes and salads and other good things away in that, and eat them later as he happened to need or want them, instead



“‘THEY WERE FOUND SOME DAYS LATER WHEN THE ROOM  
WAS PUT IN ORDER’”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

of in his own inner self, the good old custom might have been preserved, but that is impossible in these conventional days."

"You needn't have eaten it all," put in Mrs. Idiot. "You could have pretended to eat it and put it down somewhere."

"I know that, my dear. I didn't even on that occasion eat it all—I only ate what I told you. I found eight sandwiches and a pint of salted almonds in my coat-tail pocket the next morning, which I managed surreptitiously to hide away while my hostesses were getting me something else, and in one place, while nobody was watching me, I hid a half-dozen pickled oysters under a sofa, where I suppose they were found some days later when the room was put in order."

As the Idiot spoke the clock struck twelve, and the guests all rose up.

"Here's to the New Year!" said Mr. Pedagog.

"Not yet," interposed the Idiot. "That's only a signal for the Welsh rarebits to be brought in. I've sworn them off for the New Year, but I haven't for the old. The clock is a half-hour fast."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"No, my dear," said Mrs. Idiot. "It was, but I put it back. It's exactly right now."

"Then," said the Idiot, "I join you in the toast, Mr. Pedagog. Here's to the New Year: may it bring joy to everybody. Meanwhile may it bring also the Welsh rarebits."

"I thought you'd sworn off," suggested Mr. Pedagog.

"So I had," replied the Idiot, "but circumstances over which I have no control force me to postpone my reformation for another twelve months. If they had been served at half-past eleven I should have stuck to my resolve; as they have been delayed until twelve-one I cannot do less than eat them. I do not believe in wilful waste; and besides, it is quite as much the duty of the host to consume the good things he places before his guests as it is for the guests to partake. I can wait a year, I think, without wholly ruining what little digestion my former devotion to New-Year's calling has left me. Gentlemen, I propose the ladies: May their future be as golden as this rarebit; and for the men, may they always be worthy to be the toast upon which that golden future

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

may rest with the certainty born of confidence."

And the guests fell to and ate each a golden buck to the New Year—all save Mollie and Tommy. These two important members of the household went up to their little beds, but just before going to sleep Tommy called through the door to his little sister:

"Mollie!"

"Yeth!"

"Want to play a game with me to-morrow?"

"Yeth!"

"Well, you get a cake and a pie and some gingersnaps and a lot of apples and some candy and we'll play New-Year's calls."

"Splendid!" lisped Mollie. "You'll call on me?"

"Yes," said Tommy; "and all you'll have to do will be to force food on me."

And they soon passed into the land of dreams.



## XII

### SOME DOMESTIC INVENTIONS

"I THINK I'll give up the business of broking and go into inventing," said the Idiot one Sunday morning, as he and Mrs. Idiot and their friends sat down at breakfast. "There's not much money in stocks, but the successful inventor of a patent clothes-pin makes a fortune."

"I'd think twice about that before acting," observed Mr. Brief. "There may not be much money in stocks, but you can work eight hours a day, and get good pay in a broker's office, while the inventor has to wait upon inspiration."

"True enough," said the Idiot; "but waiting on inspiration isn't a bad business in itself. You can play golf or read a rattling good novel, or go to a yacht-race while you wait."

"But where does the money come in?"

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

asked Mr. Pedagog, his usual caution coming to the fore.

"Inspiration brings it with her," said the Idiot, "and by the barrel, too. What's the use of toiling eight hours a day for fifty weeks in a year for three thousand dollars when by waiting on inspiration in a pleasant way you make a million all of a sudden?"

"Well," said Mr. Pedagog, indulgently, "if you have the inspiration lassoed, as you might say, your argument is all right; but if you are merely going to sit down and wait for it to ring you up on the telephone, and ask you when and where you wish your barrels of gold delivered, I think it will be your creditors, and not fortune, who will be found knocking at your door. How are you going about this business, provided you do retire from Wall Street?"

"Choose my field and work it," replied the Idiot. "For the present I should choose the home. That is the field I am most interested in just now. I should study its necessities, and endeavor to meet whatever these might demand with an adequate supply. Any man who stays around home all day will find lots

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

of room for the employment of his talents along inventive lines."

"You've tried it, have you?" asked Mr. Brief.

"Certainly I have," said the Idiot, "though I haven't invented anything yet. Why, only last week I stayed home on Monday—wash-day—and a thousand things that might be invented suggested themselves to me."

"As, for instance?" asked Mrs. Idiot, who was anxious to know of any possible thing that could mitigate the horrors of wash-day.

"Well, it wouldn't help *you* much, my dear," said the Idiot, "but the wash-lady would hail with unmixed delight a substitute for her mouth to hold clothes-pins in while she is hanging out the clothes. I watched Ellen in the yard for ten minutes that day, and it was pathetic. There she was, standing on her tiptoes, hanging innumerable garments on the line, her mouth full of clothes-pins, and Jimpsonberry's hired man leaning over the fence trying to shout sweet nothings in her ear. If she had had a nice little basket-hat on her head to hold the pins in she could have answered back without stopping her



“‘THERE’S NOT MUCH MONKEY IN STOCKS’”



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

work every other minute to take them out of her mouth in order to retort to his honeyed sentiments."

Mrs. Idiot laughed. "Ellen finds time enough to talk and do the washing, too," she said. "I sometimes think she does more talking than washing."

"No doubt of it; she's only human, like the rest of us," said the Idiot. "But she might save time to do something else for us if she could do the washing and the talking at the same time. She may give up the washing, but she'll never give up the talking. Therefore, why not make the talking easier?"

"What you need most, I think," put in Mr. Brief, "is an instrument to keep hired men from leaning over the fence and distracting the attention of the laundress from her work. That would be a great boon."

"Not unless idleness is a great boon," retorted the Idiot. "Half the hired men I know would be utterly out of employment if they couldn't lean over a fence and talk to somebody. Leaning over a fence and talking to somebody forms seventy-five per cent. of the hired man's daily labor. He seems to think that is

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

what he is paid for. Still, any one who objects could very easily remedy the conversational detail in so far as it goes on over the fence."

"By the use of barbed wire, I presume," suggested Mr. Pedagog.

"By something far more subtle and delicately suggestive," rejoined the Idiot. "Hired men do not mind barbed-wire fences. They rather like them when they annoy other people. When they annoy themselves they know how to treat them. My own man Mike, for instance, minds them not at all. Indeed, he has taken my pruning-shears and clipped all the barbs off the small stretch of it we had at the rear end of our lot to keep him from climbing over for a short cut home."

"With what result?" asked Mr. Brief.

"With the result that I had to buy a new pair of pruning-shears," said the Idiot. "My Anti-Over-the-Fence-Gabber," he continued, "would involve certain complex details, but it would work. I should have an electric battery connected with the upper cable of the fence, and an operator stationed inside of the house, close to a key which would send some six



“A NICE LITTLE BASKET-HAT ON HER HEAD TO HOLD  
THE PINS IN’”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

hundred or seven hundred volts through the cable whenever needed. Then if I felt that Jimpsonberry's man was interfering with my laundress, as soon as he leaned over the fence I'd have the operator send him an electric notice to quit."

"A message?" said Mr. Pedagog.

"No, a plain shock. Two hundred volts as a starter, three hundred as a reminder, and the full seven hundred if necessary to make the hint plainer."

"That would be cruel," observed Mrs. Pedagog.

"Not wholly," said the Idiot. "It would be an advantage to the man himself in one way. Hired men have too little electricity in their systems, Mrs. Pedagog. If Jimpsonberry's man, for instance, would take all the electricity I'd give him and apply it to his work, Jimpsonberry's unpulled dandelions would not be such a constant menace to my lawn. I compel Mike to weed out my lawn every spring and autumn, but Jimpsonberry doesn't attend to his at all. He doesn't sleep on it, and so doesn't bother about it. Consequently, when his dandelions go to seed the seed is blown

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

over into my grass, and every year I get an uninvited crop, which at a dollar a thousand would make me a millionaire."

"Why don't you apply your inventive genius to the discovery of a seedless dandelion?" asked the Lawyer. "It seems to me that would be the best solution of the dandelion problem."

"Because Jimpsonberry wouldn't have 'em if I discovered 'em," said the Idiot. "I judge from the millions he raises every year that he is satisfied with dandelions as they are. He's got enough for himself, and never makes any charge for those he gives to his neighbors."

"I think a furnace-feeder would be a good thing, too," the Idiot continued, in a moment. "My furnace is a chronic sufferer from indigestion because on some days it is gorged with coal and on others with ashes. Seems to me if I could get a month's time in which to concentrate my attention upon a furnace-feeder, I could devise some kind of a contraption that would invoke the enthusiastic love of the suburban resident in Arctic latitudes the world over."

"I have often thought of that possibility myself," observed Mr. Pedagóg, his



**“AN ELECTRIC NOTICE TO QUIT”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

eyes fondly resting upon a steaming plate of griddle-cakes that had just been brought in. "But coal is a rebellious quantity. A furnace-feeder would need to be delicately adjusted, and coal cannot be handled with delicacy. It requires a chute rather than a tube. It must be manipulated with the shovel, not the sugar-tongs."

"Correct," said the Idiot. "Therefore, *you* would experiment on a chute or a shovel, abandoning all idea of refining the coal. I, on the other hand, would experiment with the coal itself, Mr. Pedagog. Why not liquefy it, and let it drop automatically into the furnace through a self-acting spigot?"

"Liquefy coal?" asked Mr. Pedagog.

"Certainly," replied the Idiot, "We liquefy pretty nearly everything else. If liquid air, why not liquid coal? Everything we have in nature in these days apparently can be liquefied, and while I am not familiar with the process, I see no reason why a ton of coal should not be reduced to such a shape that it can be bottled. Once bottled and provided with an automatic dropper, it could easily be adjusted so as to flow in proper

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

quantities into the furnace at proper intervals."

"It would be very expensive. Do you know what a pint of liquid air costs?" demanded the Doctor.

"No," said the Idiot. "I neither breathe nor drink it. The plain old stuff is good enough for me, and cheap if you don't have to go to the mountains or the seashore to get your supply."

"Granting coal could be liquefied," the Doctor assented, "I venture to say that a ton of it would cost as much as five hundred dollars."

"I've no doubt it would," said the Idiot; "but I could afford a ton of coal at five hundred dollars if my scheme worked. A successful invention would make bread seem cheap at ten dollars a loaf. There's another thing I should put my mind on, and that is a method of cooking a cauliflower so that everybody in the house, as well as the neighbors, should not know that you are doing so," he continued. "I am particularly fond of cauliflower, but it is undeniable that in the process of cooking it becomes obtrusive, almost to the point of ostentation. I've spoken about it many times. Mike,

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

the gardener, to whom I've spoken on the subject, thinks the cauliflower itself, if sprinkled with *eau de Cologne* while growing, would cease to be obnoxious in the cooking; but that is too expensive a process. It would take a dozen cases of *eau de Cologne* to bring a single cauliflower to maturity. My son, Tommy, has stated that he thinks it might be boiled in Florida-water instead of in the simple variety that comes from the pipes. A good suggestion for a small boy, but also expensive. Hired men and small boys do not think of the exchequer of the principal in their plans. They don't have to. Their allowance and wages are usually all velvet—an elegant vulgarity for surplus—and for my own part I have constantly to veto their little schemes for the betterment of my condition in order to have any condition at all left. But as far as the arrangement of an odorless cauliflower-cooker is concerned, it is as simple as A B C, barring one or two complications."

"I wish you'd hurry up and invent it," cried Mrs. Idiot, with enthusiasm. "What are the main features of this simple contrivance?"



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"I'd have a boiler, in the first place, in which to boil the animal," said the Idiot. "When the water was ready I'd clap the creature into it, and before it had time to remonstrate I'd fasten a hermetically sealed cover over the top."

"But when you took it off the results would still be overpowering," said Mr. Pedagog.

"No, my dear sir," said the Idiot, "for the simple reason that I should affix a cold-air box and a flue to the hermetically sealed boiler. Through the cold-air box fresh air would constantly flow into the boiler. Through the flue all the aromatic drawbacks of the cauliflower would be carried off through the chimney into the upper air. Anybody who wished to know whether we were going to have cauliflower for dinner or not would have to climb up to the roof and sniff at the chimney-top to find out."

"It is simple, isn't it, Mrs. Idiot?" Mrs. Pedagog said.

"Very," replied Mrs. Idiot. "Indeed, it seems so extremely simple that I should like to know where the complications lie."

"Where all the complications in cook-



**FINDING OUT WHAT IS BEING COOKED FOR DINNER**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ing lie, my dear," said the Idiot, "in the cook. The chief complication would lie in getting a cook who could, or if she could, would, use the thing intelligently."

"I don't see," said Mr. Brief, dryly—"I don't see but that what you ought to devote your time to, my dear Idiot, is the invention of an intelligent cook."

"Humph!" laughed the Idiot. "I may be an idiot, Mr. Brief, but I'm not an ass. There are some things that man may reasonably hope to accomplish—such as setting fire to the Hudson River, or growing butternuts on the summit of Mont Blanc—but as for trying to invent an intelligent cook who would stay in the country for more than two weeks for less than ten thousand dollars a year, that, sir, is beyond all the conceptions of the human mind."

"Ain't Bridget intelligent, pa?" asked Tommy.

Here was a complication, for Tommy liked to retail to Bridget the gossip of the day, and especially what "pa said."

"H'm — ah — oh yes, indeed, she is, Tommy," the Idiot replied, with some embarrassment. "Very; she's been with us three months."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"How much do you pay her, pa?" asked the boy.

"Well," said the Idiot, "not more than fifteen hundred dollars a month. Just take another griddle-cake, my son, and remember that there are some things little boys should not talk about."

"Like tumpany's bald heads?" lisped Mollie, complacently, her eye fixed upon Mr. Pedagog's shining dome.

"Precisely," observed Mr. Pedagog, appreciating the situation.

And while everybody else laughed the Idiot looked upon his children with a sternly affectionate face.

"My dear," said he to Mrs. Idiot, "I think it is time the babies got ready for Sunday-school."

## XIII

### A SUBURBAN COMPLICATION

"WELL, old chap," said the Poet some weeks later, when he happened to be spending the night off in the suburbs with his old friend, "how goes the noble art of inventing? Has your horseless cauliflower bloomed as yet?"

"Horseless cauliflower is good, but tautological," said the Idiot. "The cauliflower is an automobile in itself, without the intervention of man. Who told you I was inventing instead of broking these days?"

"Mr. Pedagog said something about it the last time I met him," said the Poet. "He's a mighty good friend of yours. He says you are the most perfect Idiot he ever met."

"He's a bully good fellow," said the Idiot, affectionately. "You know I used to think Pedagog wasn't of any earthly use

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

except to teach people things, but as I look back upon my experience with him he has never taught me anything that was worth forgetting. So he told you I was going into invention, did he?"

"Yes; and he said he thought you were going about it in the right way," rejoined the Poet. "You weren't spending ten thousand dollars to get a four-dollar invention on the market, he said, but were inventing things that you knew at the outset weren't worth risking your money on."

The Idiot smiled broadly.

"He said that, did he? Well, he doesn't know what he is talking about," he retorted. "I am spending money on my inventions. I have already invested fifty cents in my patent Clothes-Pin-Holding Laundry-Bonnet, and I have strung the wires along my fence to be used in my electric Hired-Man-Discourager; and when I have managed to save up a few dollars more I'm going to get a battery to attach to it, when woe betide that man of Jimpsonberry's if he tries to talk to Maria while she is at work! Furthermore, I have extended the operations of that same useful invention so that it will meet a long-felt want in all suburban communities as a



**“COURTING HIS BEST GIRL ON SOME OTHER FELLOW’S  
STONE WALL”**





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

discourager of promiscuous wooing. You never lived in the country, did you?"

"Not permanently," said the Poet.

"Then you are not aware of a singular habit the young country swain has of courting his best girl on some other fellow's stone wall after the sun goes down," said the Idiot. "Some balmy evening next spring, if you'll come up here I'll show you one of the features of suburban life that will give you an idea for a poem. That stone wall that runs along the front of my place has been the scene of more engagements than I can tell you of. Many a time when I have come home late at night I have counted as many as ten couples sitting on the cold coping of that wall telling each other how beautiful the world is, and holding each other on with loving arms."

"Rather an affecting scene, that," said the Poet.

"It was at first," rejoined the Idiot, "and I rather liked to see it. Indeed, I once suggested to Mrs. Idiot that we should have the coping upholstered, so that they might sit more comfortably. I even wanted to put a back along the inner side of it for them to lean against, but after a while it palled. We couldn't sit out on our own

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

front porch on a summer evening and talk without sentimental interruptions that were demoralizing to a sustained conversation. We'd try to talk, for instance, about Browning, or Tennyson, or Le Gallienne, or some other poet of their class, when we'd be interrupted by such sentiments as, 'Ess I is,' and 'I's oo ducky,' and 'Ain't de moon boofer?' Then when we had guests we never dared to take them out-of-doors, but remained cooped up inside the house, because Mrs. Idiot feared to intrude upon the sacred right of those ten couples to do their courting comparatively unobserved."

"It must have been a nuisance," said the Poet.

"It grew to be so; but I hadn't the heart to stop it, even if I could have done so, so I put up a hedge to hide them from view and soften the sound of their voices; but it didn't work very long. They didn't seem to appreciate my motive, and it so happened that the hedge which I put up with the most innocent of intentions was a Japanese quince that blossoms out in thorns half an inch long, to an extent which suggests the fretful porcupine. These, for some reason or other, excited



**“‘HOLDING UP A GREAT OSAGE ORANGE’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

the animosity of my twenty young friends on the wall, and at the end of the season there were not two consecutive feet of the hedge that had not been hacked and cut to pieces by my indignant but uninvited guests."

"What impudence!" cried the Poet.

"Only the ardor of youth," observed the Idiot, calmly. "Put yourself in the same place. Suppose that you, just as you were about to declare your undying love for the girl of your choice, and while gently stealing your arm about her waist, were to have the back of your hand ripped off by a brutal hedge?"

"I see," laughed the Poet. "I dare say I should be indignant."

"They were properly so," said the Idiot, "properly so; and neither Mrs. Idiot nor I really blamed them.

"We let the matter rest, and made no complaint," he continued. "Time went on, and the courtiers became a trifle more assertive. One of them came into the house one evening and demanded to know what I meant by assaulting him and his lady friend, holding up a great Osage orange which he alleged to have been the murderous weapon I had used; and I real-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ly had to apologize, for I was guilty. It happened that while walking about my small preserves I had picked up this orange, which had fallen onto my lawn from a tree on Jimpsonberry's place, and had unthinkingly tried to see how far I could throw it. It went just over the hedge, and had unceremoniously knocked Strephon's hat into the middle of next week and frightened Phyllis into hysterics. I was placed on the defensive, but for the life of me I couldn't help laughing, with the result that Strephon stalked angrily away, alleging that I should hear from him further in the matter."

"And did you?" asked the Poet.

"No," said the Idiot, "I never did; but the incident rather soured me towards the people who seemed to regard my stone wall as their property. I even came to feel like purchasing a gatling-gun and loading it with Osage oranges for the purpose of repelling them, but even under this provocation I still continued to ignore the matter."

"You are too easy-going," suggested the Poet.

"I was," said the Idiot, "until they began to use the sidewalk that runs par-



“THE PICTURE OF A HEART WITH AN ARROW DRAWN  
THROUGH IT”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

allel with the wall as a tablet upon which to inscribe in letters of flame their undying affection. One Sunday morning, as Mrs. Idiot and I started for church, we were horrified to find our flagstones scribbled all over with poetry, done in chalk, after the order of

Roses is pink, and violets is blue,  
Sugar is sweet, and so be you.

Further along was the picture of a heart with an arrow drawn through it, and the two names 'Larry' and 'Mame' written on either side. And one unusually affectionate youth had actually cut the initials of his young lady and himself in the top of the coping, with a cold-chisel, I suspect. It's there yet. It was then my spirit rose up into fierce denunciation. That night, when the clans had gathered and were going through the initial stages I marched out in front of them, cleared my throat ostentatiously, and made a speech. It was the most nervous speech I ever made; worse than after-dinner speaking by a good deal. I called their attention to how I had suffered: referred pathetically to the destruction of the

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

hedge; inveighed sarcastically against the Osage-orange man; told them in highly original fashion that worms, if taken at the ebb that leads on to fortune, would surely turn and rend their persecutors, and that I'd had enough. I forgave them the hedge; I forgave them the annoyance they had cost me, but I asserted that I'd see them all condemned to eternal celibacy before I would permit my sidewalk to be turned into an anthology of love, and my coping into an intaglio of eternal blessedness. I requested them if they wished to write poetry to write it upon their own hearths, and if they had any inscriptions to cut to chip in and buy an obelisk of their own and hieroglyph to their hearts' content. I even offered to buy them each a slate and pencil, which they might bring with them when they came, upon which to send their sentiments down to posterity, and I finished with what I consider to be a pleasing perversion of Longfellow's poem on the Woodman, with a few lines beginning:

Scribbler, spare that sidewalk.

Then I departed, threatening to have them all arrested."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME.

"Good!" said the Poet. "I didn't think you'd ever do it. You have nerve enough, but you are too good-natured."

"I wasn't good-natured then," said the Idiot, regretfully; "and when I got through I stalked back into the house, scolded Mollie, sent Tommy to bed, and behaved like a bear for the rest of the evening."

"And the people on the wall? They slunk away in despair, I suppose," said the Poet.

"Not they," said the Idiot; "not by a long shot. They combined against me, and next morning when I started for town I found my sidewalk in worse shape than ever. One flag had written upon it the pleasing mandate 'Go drown yourself.' Another bore the mystic word 'Chump' in great capital letters, and at the end of my walk was a pastel portrait of myself, of rough and awkward composition, labelled with my name in full. It took my hired man two weeks to scrub it out. And on the following Hallowe'en they strung a huge banner on my telephone wires, inscribed 'The Idiot Asylum,' and every blessed gate I have to my name had been removed from the premises."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"What an outrage!" cried the Poet.

"Not a bit of it. Merely a suburban ebullition," said the Idiot. "They don't mean anything by it. They are mere children, after all, and from their point of view I have interfered with their rights."

"And you propose to stand all this?" asked the Poet. "If I were you I'd get a pile of broken bottles, as they do in England, and place them along the top of that wall so that they couldn't possibly use it."

"Brutal custom, that," said the Idiot. "May do for Englishmen; won't do here at all. In the first place, it spoils the appearance of the wall; in the second place, it is not efficacious; in the third place, it would place me in a false position. Everybody'd soon be asking where I got all those bottles. An Englishman drinks enough beer in the course of a week to keep his walls covered with broken bottles for a century. I don't, and I'm not going to buy bottles. I've got a better scheme."

"Ah!" cried the Poet. "Now we are coming to the invention."

"Merely an extension of my 'Hired-Man - Discourager,'" said the Idiot. "Simple, and I trust efficacious. I am going to put a live wire along the coping



**“IT TOOK MY HIRED MAN TWO WEEKS TO SCRUB IT OUT”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

of my wall. Broken bottles are cheap, my dear Poet, but they don't work. If I put broken bottles on my wall the Amalgamated Brotherhood of Wooers would meet on my lawn and pass resolutions against me, and ultimately they would demand the use of my parlor, unless I misunderstand their nature.

"The lovers' rights must be respected always, and I'm truly thankful that they have stopped short at my frontage. When they operate along my frontier-line they are harmless, interesting, even amusing. If they carry their principles through and penetrate beyond the edge, why, then Mrs. Idiot and I will have to give it up.

"My scheme is to make them feel that they are welcome to the wall, but to make the wall—well, to give an element of surprise to the wall. Just as Jimpsonberry's man is soon to be surprised electrically, which is legitimately, so do I propose to surprise these inconsiderate persons who cut down my hedges, who scribble up my sidewalk with their poems, and who hang Hallowe'en banners on my telephone wires. I wish them all well, but next spring when they attempt to revive the cus-



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

toms of the past they will find that even I am resentful."

"But how?"

"I shall have a wire running along the coping, as I have already said, that between the hours of eight and twelve P.M. will be so full of shocking things that my uninvited guests will cease to bother me. Can you imagine the effect of a live wire upon ten loving couples engaged in looking at the moon while sitting on it?"

"Yet you claim to insist upon their rights as lovers," said the Poet, deprecatingly.

"Certainly I do," said the Idiot. "Man has a right to make love wherever he can. If he can't make love on my wall, let him make love somewhere else."

"But where?" cried the Poet. "Your swains up here have no home, apparently."

"Or Jimpsonberry's wall," said the Idiot. "By the way, do you know anything about moths?"

## XIV

### SOME CONSIDERATION OF THE MOTH

"Do you know anything about the habits of moths?" repeated the Idiot.

"Moths?" echoed the Poet, eyeing the Idiot closely, the transition from live wires to moths proving rather too sudden for his comprehension. "No, I don't know anything about moths except that I have heard that they are an unmitigated nuisance."

"They are worse than a nuisance," said the Idiot. "They are a devouring element, and they are worse than fire. If your house catches fire you can summon an engine and have it put out, and what damage it does you can collect for if you are careful enough to keep your possessions insured; but with the moth it is different. There isn't any moth department in town that you can ring up, nor is there

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

a moth-extinguisher that you can keep close at hand to fight them with. Furthermore, there is no moth-insurance company here or elsewhere to protect the man who suffers damage at their teeth, that I know of.

“He is a mean, sneaking, underhanded element, the moth is. Fire has a decent sense of the proprieties. Moths have none at all. When fire attacks you it smokes, and crackles, and hisses, and roars, and lets you know in clarion tones that it has come. The moth steals upon you in the dead of night, and chews up your best trousers, gorges himself upon your wife’s furs, tickles his palate with your swellest flannel golf-shirt, munches away upon your handsomest rug, punches holes in your best sofa-cushions with his tusks, and then silently folds his tent and steals away without so much as a thank-you for his meal. For unmitigated meanness commend me to the moth!”

“You seem to speak with feeling,” said the Poet, with a smile. “Have you suffered?”

“Suffered?” cried the Idiot. “Suffered is not the word. They have tortured me. Alongside of the moth and his



**“AN UNPAID GROCER’S BILL BECOMES AN ABSOLUTE PLEASURE”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

nefarious work even a book-agent pales into insignificance, and an unpaid grocer's bill becomes an absolute pleasure. You can meet a book-agent on his own ground, for you know his limitations. I have done so myself. Only yesterday one of them called upon me to sell me a Cyclopedia of Cookery, and before he got away I had actually sold him a copy of your poems."

"Ah," said the Poet, shaking his head.

"You sold my gift, did you?"

"Not a bit of it," laughed the Idiot.

"When your book came out I bought a copy, and two days later you sent me another with an inscription, which I treasure affectionately. I sold him the one I bought."

"You are a beautiful Idiot," said the Poet, slapping his knee enthusiastically.

"I don't lay claim so much to beauty as to sublimity," said the Idiot, lighting a cigar. "And even that is not to my credit. Beauty and sublimity are gifts. No amount of cultivation can produce genius when it does not exist. When I see a beautiful woman it is not she that I admire. I admire the gracious Hand that made her."

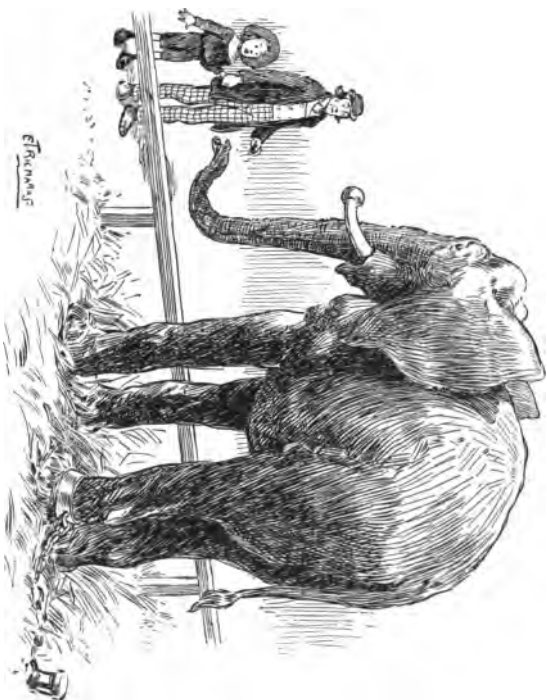
## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Give me that idea, old man!" cried the Poet.

"It is yours from this on," said the Idiot, with a sigh. "I am not equal to it. I may be able to think thoughts, but thoughts are of no more use to me than a piano is to a man who can't read music. But we are becoming discursive. We were talking about moths, not thoughts. You said that I must have suffered, and I said that I had been tortured, and I have. My evening clothes have been ruined by them; my best shirts have been eaten by them; my silk hat, in which I have taken much pride, has four bald spots on its side because of their insatiable appetite, and as far as I can find out, I have no redress. You can't sue a moth for damages, you know, with any degree of satisfaction."

"Why should you expect to sue a moth for damages any more than to have a mosquito indicted for assault?" suggested the Poet.

"Oh, as for that," said the Idiot, "you can treat the mosquito without much difficulty. He merits capital punishment, and if you are yourself alert you can squash him at the moment of his crime. But the moth is different. You are ab-



“‘THE LION, THE ELEPHANT, THE TIGER, ALL HAVE THEIR WORK TO DO’”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

solutely helpless in the face of him. He works in secret."

"I am told that there are such things as camphor-balls," observed the Poet.

"There are," said the Idiot. "And I truly think the moth enjoys them as much as a young girl enjoys a military ball. Whenever we give a camphor-ball the moths attend, and as far as I can find out dance all through it. They seem to enjoy functions of that nature. Furthermore, I have yet to meet the man who likes to go about in a suit of clothes that smells like a drug-store. I don't. I hate the odor of camphor, and if I have my choice of going to a dinner in a perforated dress-suit or in one that is redolent of the camphor-ball, I prefer the one with holes in it. What I can't understand is why a race as proud as the one to which you and I belong should have to knuckle under to an inferior lot of insects such as the moth represents."

"I suppose there is something about it that we cannot understand," said the Poet, dreamily. "All created things have their uses. The lion, the elephant, the tiger, the boa-constrictor, all have their work to do in life. Even the mosquito has his

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

mission, whatever it may be. You must admit this. Why not, therefore, admit that the moth serves a purpose in the great scheme of life?"

"My dear Poet," said the Idiot, "far be it from me to deny the truth of what you say. There is hardly a living creature that I have ever encountered in all my life that has not had some truly utilitarian quality in its make-up. The lion is a splendid creature, and with the bear and the fox and the rhinoceros and the tapir he serves a purpose. They at least teach boys geography, and teach it interestingly. The boy who knows where the tapir hath its lair knows more geography than I do. My son Tommy has learned more of geography from a visit to the circus where those animals are shown than he ever learned from books. I can quite see likewise the utilitarian value of the mosquito. He keeps the sea-shore from being overcrowded, and he prevents some people from sleeping too much. He is an accomplished vocalist, and from my own point of view is superior to a Wagner opera, since Wagner opera puts me to sleep, while the magnificent discords of the mosquito keep me awake. But the



**“‘THEY EAT UP MY NEW CLOTHES’”**



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

moth is beyond me. What his contribution to the public welfare may be I cannot reason out, although I have tried."

"And you find nothing in his favor?" asked the Poet.

"Much," replied the Idiot, "but he has no system. His mission is to eat old clothes, but he is such a very disgusting glutton that he does not discriminate between old and new, and I have no use for him. If in his search for a meal he would choose the garments of three years ago, which I ought not to wear because they are so old-fashioned as to make me conspicuous when I do wear them, it would be all right. But the moth is no such discriminating person. He is not a lover of old vintages. When he calls in a number of his brother moths to dine at his expense he does not treat them to an overcoat of '89, or to a dress-suit of '93, or to a silk hat laid down in '95. He wants the latest thing, and as far as I can find out he gets it. I have just been compelled to lay in a new stock of under and over clothes because the ones I had have been served upon his table."

"The moth must live," observed the Poet.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"I'm perfectly willing he should if he'll only discriminate," retorted the Idiot. "We have enough old clothes in this house, my dear Poet, to give a banquet of seventeen courses to six hundred moths every night for the next six months. If they would content themselves with that I should be satisfied. But they won't. They eat up my new clothes; they destroy my new hats; they munch away upon my most treasured golf-vests. That is why I asked you if you knew anything about moths. I am anxious to reform them. As you have said, I have gone into inventing, and my inventions are wholly designed to meet long-felt wants in all households. The man who invents a scheme to circumvent or properly to satisfy the appetite of the moth will find his name indissolubly linked with fame. I have thought, and thought, and thought about it. The moth must either be domesticated or extinguished. I have tried to extinguish him, but without avail. When he has flown forth I have endeavored to punch him in the head, and I have wasted my energy upon the unresponsive air. Did you ever undertake to punch a moth in the head?"



“WASTED MY ENERGY UPON THE UNRESPONSIVE AIR”





## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Never," said the Poet. "I am not a fighter."

"My dear boy," rejoined the Idiot, "I don't know a hero in real life or in fiction who could meet a moth on his own ground. I read about Mr. Willie B. Travers, of New York, who can drive four horses about the arena at the horse show without turning a hair. I read about Emerson McJones, of Boston, putting up his face against the administration on a question of national import. I have read of the prowess of Alexander, of Cæsar, of D'Artagnan, of Bonaparte, and of Teddy Roosevelt, but there isn't a man among 'em who can fight the moth. You can bombard him with a gatling-gun loaded to the muzzle with camphor-balls, and he still waves his banner defiantly in your face. You may lunge at him with a rapier, and he jumps lightly aside, and to express his contempt bites a hole in your parlor hangings. You can turn the hose on him, and he soars buoyantly away out of reach. You can't kill him, because you can't catch him. You can't drive him away, and until we go back to the dress of the knights of old and wear nickel-plated steel clothing, and live in rooms

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

of solid masonry, we can't starve him out. There is, therefore, only one thing to do, and that is to domesticate him. If you in the course of your investigations into nature have ever discovered any trait in the moth that science can lay hold upon, something through which we can appeal to his better nature, if he has such a thing, you will be conferring a great boon upon the whole domestic world. What I want to find out is if he possesses some particularly well-defined taste; if there is any one kind of texture or fabric that he likes better than another. If there is such a thing I'll have a brand-new suit made of that same material especially for him, furnish a nice comfortable, warm spot in the attic as a dining-room, and let him feed there forevermore, when and how he pleases. The manners and customs of moths are an open book to most of us. His tastes are as mysterious as the ocean's depths."

The Poet shook his head dubiously. "I am afraid, my dear Idiot, that you have at last tackled a problem that will prove too much for you. How to get at the point you desire is, I fear, impossible of discovery," he said.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"It would seem so," replied the Idiot. "But I shall not despair. If the ordinary cook of commerce can be made humanly intelligent I do not see any reason why we should abandon so comparatively simple a proposition as the domesticization of the moth."

Tommy and Mollie had been listening with great interest, and as the Idiot finished Mollie observed that she thought the best way to do was to ask the moth what he liked most, but Tommy had a less conciliatory plan.

"Best thing's to get rid of 'em altogether, pa," he said. "Mollie and I'll squash 'em for you for fi' cents apiece."

Which struck the Poet as the most practical idea that had been advanced during the discussion.

## XV

### SOME CONSIDERATION OF THE BURGLAR

"ARE you ever bothered much by burglars off here in the country?" asked Mr. Pedagog one spring afternoon, as he and the Idiot and the youngsters strolled about the Idiot's small farm.

"No," said the Idiot. "They've only visited me twice."

"Only twice, eh?" observed the Schoolmaster. "Well, I should think that was often enough, considering that you haven't lived here more than a year and a half."

"It was," said the Idiot. "I didn't say I wanted them to come again, did I?"

"Of course not," returned Mr. Pedagog. "But you said 'only twice,' as if two visits of that nature were less than might have been expected."

"Well, aren't they?" asked the Idiot. "Just make a little calculation. I've lived on this place precisely five hundred and

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

ninety-four days, and, of course, an equal number of nights. It seems to me that in breaking into my house only twice when they might have come every night shows a degree of restraint upon our Suburban Burglary Company that is worthy of the highest commendation. You, of course, refer to professional burglars, don't you?"

Mr. Pedagog laughed. "Are there any amateur burglars?"

"Are there!" ejaculated the Idiot. "Well, rather. There is the Gasman, and man who inspects the water-meter, and the Iceman, and the Plumber. If you refer to that class, why, I have them with me always."

"Which of the two classes do you prefer?" asked Mr. Pedagog, with a chuckle.

"Well, I'm not quite sure as to that," returned the Idiot. "I've often wondered myself whether I preferred the straight-out honest pirate, who does his work surreptitiously by night, and who doesn't pretend to be anything but a pirate, or the sleek, insinuating chap, who comes into your house by day, and runs up a bill against you which in his heart of hearts he knows is not a proper one. There are burglars and burglars in this world, Mr.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

Pedagog, and the one who lands in the penitentiary is not always a bigger rascal than the fellow who holds the respect of the community and sets himself up as a prominent citizen. Highwaymen may be divided into classes, some of them respectable, others not. There was Dick Turpin, who ran honest risks to obtain a living; there are men in Wall Street who work greater ruin, and are held in higher esteem. There is the footpad who takes your watch, and pawns it to buy bread for his starving family, and there is the very charming young person who sits behind a table at a church fair, and charges you seven dollars for a fifty-cent sofa-cushion. So it goes. Socially I prefer the esteemed citizen who makes me pay twenty-eight dollars for ten dollars' worth of gas; but when it comes down to a strict business basis I must say I have lost less money through the operations of the professional thief than through those of the amateur highwayman. Take a recent case in my own experience, for instance. Only last week I sent anonymously a small clock which cost me twenty dollars to a guild fair here in town, and Mrs. Idiot bought it for a birthday present for me for forty dollars. In other words, I

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

have a twenty-dollar clock on my hands that has cost me sixty dollars."

"But you have the satisfaction of knowing that you have contributed to the good work of the guild," suggested Mr. Pedagog.

"That is true enough," said the Idiot; "but the guild is only forty dollars to the good. They'd have been better off if I had given them fifty dollars in cash, and I'd have saved ten."

"But you have the clock," insisted Mr. Pedagog.

"I certainly have," replied the Idiot; "and if time is money I shall soon be rich, for that clock makes time to beat the band. If it keeps on as it has started and we stand by it, we shall soon be about a month ahead of the sun. It gains a week every forty-eight hours. If that clock were truthful, I should be a centenarian at forty."

"But you're not sorry you gave it?" said Mr. Pedagog, deprecatingly.

"Not at all," said the Idiot. "My only regret is that Mrs. I. bought it. But," he added, hastily, "she needn't know that."

"I won't say a word," said Mr. Pedagog.

"I won't, neither, pa," said Tommy,



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

with a degree of complacency which showed that the temptation to tell was great.

"Well, I won't say mor'n two or three words about it, anyhow," put in Mollie, not anxious to commit herself to perpetual silence on the subject.

"It is the most beautiful clock I ever saw," said the Idiot, quickly, realizing the possibilities of Mollie's two or three words.

"That's what I fink," said Mollie, "and I'm goin' to tell mamma that you said so."

"All right," said the Idiot. "Suppose you and Tommy run right up and tell her now."

"I'd rather hear you talk, pa," said Tommy.

"He does take after you, doesn't he?" said Mr. Pedagog.

"Yes," said the Idiot, "he does. He likes to hear me talk as much as I do, bless him!"

"It is a commendable sign in a son," observed Mr. Pedagog. "But tell about the two professionals. Did they get anything?"

"They did," said the Idiot. "And at the same time I lost nothing. The first chap came on the scene along about two o'clock in the morning. He was a very

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

industrious mechanic, and I regret to say he was not adequately paid for his services. He tackled the safe." At this point the Idiot threw back his head and laughed heartily.

"I have seen the safe," said Mr. Pedagog, "and to tell you the truth, my dear Idiot, I have wondered at your choosing so obvious a receptacle for your valuables. It does not, to my mind, deny itself as a safe should. It advertises the fact that your silver, your wife's jewels perhaps, are within. I have spoken once or twice to our friend Mr. Brief about it."

"No doubt," replied the Idiot. "However, I can't see why a safe has any disadvantages."

"It lies in this," said Mr. Pedagog, impressively. "You confess at once to the burglar the exact location of the things he's after. Without a safe your silver, or Mrs. Idiot's jewels, such as they are, might be found anywhere in the house. But when you take the trouble to buy a safe, any burglar in creation who has ordinary common-sense must know that your valuables are concentrated in that one spot."

"That, I rejoice to say," said the Idiot, "is the burglar's view."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"You should not rejoice," said Mr. Pedagog, with some of his old-time severity. "You make his work so comparatively easy that he is content to follow a base profession, as you have termed it. Truly, I wonder at you. You place on your first floor a bald safe—"

"I haven't seen any advertised as having a full head of hair," observed the Idiot, complacently.

"You misunderstand me," said Mr. Pedagog. "When I say bald I mean evident, plain, obvious. You practically say: Here are the things which I value. What is to be found within this safe, Mr. Burglar, *are the very things you are after*. Therefore, say you to the burglar: Attack this safe. Break it open, rifle it of its contents; in other words, here is the swag, as I believe it is called."

"You are wholly right," said the Idiot. "I bought that safe for that precise reason, and I bought a big one and a strong one. But you don't know the story of that safe, do you, Mr. Pedagog?"

"I do not," said the Schoolmaster.

"Then let me tell you," said the Idiot. "That safe has been broken open, and by a professional burglar. The burglar had

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

his tools, and he had his expert knowledge of their use. He arrived at my house, as I recall the situation, somewhere about—ah—two o'clock at night. He bored at the lock until three. He fooled about the combination. He did everything that a respectable burglar might be expected to do, and—

"He failed, of course, since you say you have lost nothing," said Mr. Pedagog.

"Not at all," said the Idiot. "After two hours and fifty-five minutes' work on that safe he got it open. And—"

"And?" queried Mr. Pedagog.

"He found it empty," said the Idiot; "absolutely empty. There was not a spoon, a fork, a tea-pot, or a diamond necklace, or even a scrap of paper in it."

"Then why do you have it," said Mr. Pedagog.

"Merely to keep the burglar busy while he is in my house, and to make him expert in honest work. An ordinary mechanic, intelligent enough to get that safe open by night or by day, would be entitled to at least two dollars for his services. The individual involved got it open; and when he opened it—"

"Found nothing!" cried Mr. Pedagog.

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Exactly," said the Idiot, pulling away on his cigar. "I suppose I should have left a check inside payable to bearer for a dollar and a half to compensate him for his trouble, but I am so neglectful that I really didn't."

"And you bought a safe—"

"Merely to provide employment for the unemployed burglar," said the Idiot. "That is all a safe is good for, Mr. Pedagog. Experience has shown that the house-safe isn't worth the paint it is covered with in the matter of protection. But as a decoy it works to a charm. A safe, in other words, is a splendid thing to keep things out of, as well as to keep the burglar busy while he is your guest. If our particular visitor had not spent all his time breaking the safe open he might have been able to locate our spoons."

"It is a pity," said Mr. Pedagog, dryly, "that you did not add to the impression the futility of his work made upon his mind a short note of admonition indicating to him that he might be in better business."

"My dear Mr. Pedagog," said the Idiot, "that would have been rude. Invited or otherwise, the man was a guest in my house, and a note of that kind would have

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

savored of sarcasm, or, if not, would have placed me in the position of having taken advantage of my guest's weakness to be facetious at his expense."

"You take an original view of it," said Mr. Pedagog.

"Not a bit of it," returned the Idiot. "I got the idea from a Boston girl. Once when she and her sister-in-law found themselves alone at night in a huge country-house they were suddenly overcome with fear of burglars, and rather than run any personal risk from the midnight marauder they left a big card on top of the safe inscribed with these words: 'Dear Sir,—The combination of this safe is 11-16-91. There is nothing in it. If you must have our silver, call at the Shawmut Safe Deposit Company, where it is now stored.' The two girls were cousins of mine."

The Schoolmaster smiled again. "There must be a streak of your particular kind of genius running all through your family," said he.

"True—there is," said the Idiot. "I'm not the only Idiot in my tribe."

"And the second burglar. How about him?" asked Mr. Pedagog.

"Oh, he was easy," said the Idiot. "I

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

compromised with him. You see, I met him on his way out. I was coming home late, and just as I arrived he was leaving. I invited him back, lit the gas in the dining-room, and asked him to join me in a bit of cold tongue and a bottle of beer. He tried to shuffle out of it, but when I said I preferred to reason with him rather than have him arrested he sat down, and we talked the situation over. I discovered that for about three hundred dollars' worth of my stuff that he had in a bag slung over his shoulder he might get as much as fifty dollars, and at great risk. I showed him how foolish that was, and offered to give him forty dollars if he'd leave the stuff, so saving me two hundred and sixty dollars, and avoiding all trouble for himself. He didn't like it at first, but under the genial influence of the beer and the cold tongue and my conversation he finally yielded, and walked out of my house with a check drawn to bearer for forty dollars in his pocket."

"I am astonished at you!" cried Mr. Pedagog. "You compounded a felony."

"Not exactly," said the Idiot. "I should have done so if I hadn't stopped payment on the check the next day."

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

"Oh," said Mr. Pedagog, "I see!"

"All I lost was the revenue-stamp on the check," said the Idiot.

"And did you ever hear from the man again?"

"Yes," observed the Idiot. "I met him on the train a day or two later—sat next to him in the smoking-car, in fact."

"And did he know you?"

"Yes. We had a very pleasant chat going to town. He said he was moving away from here. He couldn't stand it, he said. He was going to work in some new field where a man could get living pay for his work. Said he'd been robbed by some of our best people; what's the use of working for nothing? he asked. The poor man was kept down, and all that sort of talk."

"And you parted friends?"

"Yes," said the Idiot. "I felt rather sorry for him, and when he said good-bye I gave him a cigar and a five-dollar bill, and that was the end of him. I have since received a letter from him in which he said that my kindness was appreciated, and that I could leave my valuables out on the lawn all night hereafter with perfect impunity. 'There isn't a thief in our whole suburban gang would be mean



## THE IDIOT AT HOME

enough to touch it after your kindness to me,' he wrote."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Pedagog.

"Very," said the Idiot. "Nevertheless, I have not taken his hint about leaving my silver out-of-doors, and have worked as hard as ever on my patent burglar-alarm."

"Oh, indeed! Have you a new idea in that line?" asked the Schoolmaster.

"Yes," said the Idiot. "It is wholly novel. It is designed to alarm the burglar, and not scare the people in the house. Did you ever hear of anything like that before?"

"Never!" ejaculated Mr. Pedagog, with enthusiasm. "How is it to work?"

"That," said the Idiot, "is what I am trying to find out. When I do I'll let you know, Doctor."

## XVI

### CONCLUSION

MR. AND MRS. IDIOT	
REQUEST THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY	
AT DINNER	
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 31, 1900	
AT HALF-AFTER SEVEN O'CLOCK	
R.S.V.P.	LAST CALL

HANDSOMELY engraved, a card bearing the above inscription was sent about the middle of May to all the Idiot's old friends of Mrs. Smithers-Pedagog's select home for gentlemen, and it is needless to say that they all accepted.

"I wonder what the dickens he means by 'Last Call,' said Mr. Brief to the Genial Old Gentleman who occasionally im-

## THE IDIOT AT HOME

bibed. "Sounds like the warning of the dining-car porter on a Pullman train."

"I'm sure I can't imagine," said the other; "and what's more, I'm content to wait and find out. Of course you are going?"

"I am, indeed," said Mr. Brief. "I'd travel farther than that for the pleasure of an hour with the dear old boy, and particularly now that he has so good a cook. Dined there lately?"

"Yes," said the Genial Old Gentleman.

"Had any of those mulled sardines he gives you Sunday nights?"

"More than was good for me. Ain't they fine?" said the Genial Old Gentleman, smacking his lips ecstatically.

"Immense!" said Mr. Brief. "A cook that can mull sardines like that is worth her weight in gold. Where do you suppose he got her?"

"Why, he married her!" cried the Genial Old Gentleman, promptly. "Mrs. Idiot cooks those herself, on the chafing-dish. Didn't you know that?"

"No," said Mr. Brief. "I happened in late Sunday night, and we had 'em. They were so awfully good I didn't do a

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thing but eat, and forgot to ask who cooked 'em."

"It's the way of the world," sighed the Genial Old Gentleman. "We old bachelors have to get along on what comes to us, but the energetic chap who goes out into the world and marries the right sort of a woman—Jove, what a lucky chap he is!"

"There's some truth in that," agreed Mr. Brief; "but, on the whole, just think what a terrible thing it would be to marry a bad cook, and to have to eat everything she prepared with an outward show of delight just to keep peace in the family."

"That's your cautious lawyer's view of it," said the Genial Old Gentleman.

"Why the deuce don't you get married yourself, then," said Mr. Brief. "If you feel that way—"

"I don't want to," said the Genial Old Gentleman. "Fact is, Brief, old man, all I should ever marry for would be the comfort of a home, and I can always get that by going up to the Idiot's."

The other invited guests were no less perplexed by the final words of the Idiot's invitation, and with the pleasure of accepting was mingled an agreeable curiosity

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to know what was meant by "Last Call." The evening came, and all were present. It was a goodly company, and by special favor the children were allowed to sit up and partake; and, what was more, Mary, the housemaid of the old days, assisted in the serving of the dinner.

"Seems like old times," said Mr. Whitechoker, beaming at Mrs. Pedagog and smiling pleasantly at Mary. "I shall almost expect our host to be sarcastic."

"Sarcasm, Mr. Whitechoker," said the Idiot, unfolding his napkin, "is all right in its place, but as I have grown older I haven't found that having given rein to it I was happier afterwards. Sometimes, no doubt, Mrs. Pedagog has thought me rude—"

"Never!" said the ancient landlady.

"Well, there's something worse than having others think you rude," said the Idiot. "That's realizing yourself that you have been so, and I hope Mrs. Pedagog will accept here and now an apology—a blanket apology—which shall cover a multitude of past sins."

"My dear Idiot," said Mrs. Pedagog, "do you know how I have always thought of you?"

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"As a son," said Mr. Pedagog. "And I have felt towards you as a father."

"I wonder you didn't give me a thrashing once in a while, then," said the Idiot.

"We have often wished to," observed Mr. Pedagog.

"John!" cried Mrs. Pedagog.

"Well, *I* have," said Mr. Pedagog. "Mrs. Pedagog has all the amiable weakness of a woman towards her naughty boy. Spank him next time, not this."

Everybody laughed, and the Idiot rose from his place and walked to Mrs. Pedagog's side and kissed her.

"You're a nice old mommie," he said, "and the naughty boy loves you. He'll be hanged if he'll kiss his daddy, though!" he added, with a glance at Mr. Pedagog.

"I will," said Mollie; and she did so.

The old Schoolmaster returned the little girl's salute with emphasis.

"Bless you, little one!" he said, huskily. "I love you even as I loved your papa."

"I'm a-goin' to kiss everybody," said Tommy; and he started in with Mary and put his little scheme through to the bitter end. "What are we going to have for dessert?" he added, complacently, as he resumed his seat.

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"Idiot," said Mr. Brief, when the third course had been served, "what do you mean by 'Last Call?'"

"We are going to give up housekeeping," said the Idiot.

"No trouble, I hope," said Mr. Whitechoker.

"Lots!" ejaculated the Idiot. "But not very troublesome troubles. The fact is we intend to travel."

"To travel, eh?" said the Genial Old Gentleman. "Where?"

"Abroad," replied the Idiot. "We have never been abroad, you know. I've been abroad, and Mrs. Idiot has been abroad, but *we* have never been abroad. We are going together this time, and we are going to take the children, and for a year we propose to see Europe under the most favorable conditions. I think that abroad will seem a little different if we go together."

"Undoubtedly," said Mr. Whitechoker. "But London is a cold, godless place."

"It is if you go alone," said the Idiot.

"And Paris is vile," suggested Mr. Brief.

"To the man who has only himself to think of," said the Idiot.

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"And Italy is dirty," said the Bibliomaniac.

"There's water in Venice," observed the Idiot. "Not very clean water, to be sure, but wet enough to wash the edges of the sidewalks."

"And travel is uncomfortable," observed the Poet.

"Admitted," said the Idiot. "Travel is about the hardest work and the worst-paid work I know of, but we cannot help ourselves. Now that we are rich we must accept the penalties imposed by modern society upon the wealthy. You never knew a rich man to lead a comfortable life, did you, Mr. Pedagog?"

"There are few of them who seem to know how," admitted the Schoolmaster. "But—you do."

"No doubt," said the Idiot. "But you see I do not wish to be ostentatiously different from my kind, so having made a fortune I am going to live as people of fortune do and be as uncomfortable as I know how."

"I don't understand about this fortune," said Mr. Brief. "Have you run up against a rich uncle somewhere, or is this sudden wealth the result of your in-



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ventions, concerning which we have heard so much lately?"

"Neither," replied the Idiot. "The fact is, I made an investment some years ago in a certain stock, for which I paid twenty-three. I sold it three weeks ago for one hundred and sixty-three, clearing one hundred and forty dollars each on a thousand shares."

The Poet gasped.

"One hundred and forty thousand dollars profit!" cried Mr. Whitechoker.

"Yes," said the Idiot, calmly, "that's about the size of it. Terrible, isn't it? Here I was a happy man; content to stay at home and toil eight hours a day for a small stipend; living in tolerable comfort, and nothing to worry over. All of a sudden this thing happens, and like all other men of wealth I must become a wanderer. I shudder to think of what might have happened if I'd made a million; I shouldn't have had a home at all then."

The guests looked at their host with amazement. To most of them he had reached the supreme moment of his idiocy.

"Ahem!" said the Poet. "I fail to see why."

"Look at the ways of the millionaire and

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you'll see," observed the Idiot, suavely. "Given his million he gives up his house and builds himself a small, first-class hotel in some big city, which for the greater part of the year is occupied by servants. He next erects a country palace at Lenox or at Newport. This he calls a cottage, though it usually looks more like a public library or a hospital or a club-house. Then he builds himself a camp, with stained-glass windows, in the Adirondacks, and has to float a small railroad in order to get himself and his wife's trunks into camp. Shortly after these follows a bungalow modelled after a French château, somewhere in the South, and then a yacht warranted to cross the ocean in ten days, and to produce seasickness twelve hours sooner than the regular ocean-steamer, becomes one of the necessities of life. Result, he never lives anywhere. To occupy all his residences, camps, and bungalows he has to keep eternally on the move, and when he thinks he needs a trip to Europe he has his yacht got ready and sends it over, going himself on a fast steamer. He meets his yacht at Southampton, and orders the captain to proceed directly to some Mediterranean

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port, going himself, meanwhile, to London. After a month of London he goes to Paris, and thence to the Mediterranean port, where, after steaming aboard of the yacht for three or four days, he sends the boat back to New York and returns himself by the regular liner. Oh, it's a terrible thing to be a millionaire and have nowhere to lay one's head, with every poorer man envying you, many hating you, and hands raised against you everywhere!"

There was a pause, and the assembled company properly expressed their appreciation of the millionaire's hard lot by silence.

"The scheme has its advantages," observed Mrs. Idiot.

"Some," said the Idiot. "But think, my dear, of the town house with thirty-nine servants; the Newport house with thirty-four; the camp with sixty, including game-keepers and guides; the bungalow with thirty more, and the yacht with a captain, a crew, stewards, stewardesses, and a cook you can't get away from without jumping overboard. Just think how that would multiply your troubles. You would come to me from time to time and ask me how

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I could expect you to discharge seven butlers and four cooks in one morning, and no doubt you'd request me sometimes to stop in at the intelligence office on my way home and employ a dozen housemaids for you."

"But you would have a manager for all this," suggested Mrs. Pedagog.

"That's the point," observed the Idiot. "We'd have to have a manager, and for my part I shouldn't relish being managed. What chance would Mrs. Idiot have against a manager ahead of an army of servants of such magnitude? We have more than we can keep in subjection as we stand now, with this one small house. If it wasn't for Mary, who keeps an eye on things, I don't know what we should do."

"Well, I am glad you're rich, pa," said Tommy; "you can increase my allowance."

"And I can have a pony," lisped Mollie.

"Alas! Poor children!" cried the Idiot. "That is the saddest part of wealth. Instead of bringing the little ones up ourselves, to be wholly fashionable it will be necessary to sublet the contract to a committee of tutors and governesses. The obligations of social life hereafter will re-

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quire that we meet our children by appointment only, and that when they dine they shall eat in solitary grandeur until they become so polished in manners that their parents may once more formally welcome them at table. All the good old democratic ways of the domestic republic are now to be set aside. Tommy, instead of yelling for a buckwheat-cake at the top of his lungs, upon our return will request a butler in choicest French to hand him a *pâté de foie gras*; and dear little Mollie will have to give up attracting the wait-ress' attention by shying an olive-pit at her and imperiously summon her by means of an electric buzzer set to buzzing with her toe."

"Mercy! What a picture of woe!" cried Mr. Pedagog.

"Not altogether true, is it?" suggested the Doctor.

"Have you ever visited Newport?" asked the Idiot.

"No," said the Doctor, "never."

"Well, don't," said the Idiot, "unless you wish to look upon that picture—a picture of life whence childhood is abolished; where *blasé* little swells take the place of lively small boys, and diminutive grand

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duchesses, clad in regal garb, have supplanted the little daughters who bring smiles and sunshine into the life of the common people. Ah, my friends," the Idiot continued, with a shake of his head, "there are sad sights to be seen in this world, but I know of none sadder than these rich little scions of the American aristocracy in whose veins the good red blood of a not very remote ancestry has turned blue through too much high living and too little real living."

"I should think you'd take that hundred and forty thousand dollars and throw it into the sea," said Mr. Brief.

"That would be wicked waste," observed the Idiot. "I propose to use it to win back the good old home-life, and the best way to perpetuate that is to leave it for a time and travel. When you have travelled and seen how uncomfortable others are, and discovered how uncomfortable you are while travelling, nothing can exceed the bliss of getting back to the first simple principles of the real home."

"As a sensible man, why don't you stay here, then?" queried the Poet.

"Because," said the Idiot, "if I stayed here with that hundred and forty thou-

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sand dollars on my mind I should nurse it, and in a short while I'd become a millionaire, and such a misfortune as that I shall never invite. We shall go abroad and spend—"

"Not all of it, I hope?" said Mr. White-choker.

"No," replied the Idiot. "But enough of it to mitigate the horrors of our condition while absent."

And so it was that Castle Idiot was closed, and that for a time at least "The Idiot at Home" became a thing of the past. Wherever he and his small family may be, may I not bespeak for him the kindly, even affectionate, esteem of those who have followed him with me through these pages? He has his faults; they are many and manifest, for he has never shown the slightest disposition to conceal them, but, as Mrs. Pedagog remarked to me the other night, "He has a large heart, and it is in the right place. If he only wouldn't talk so much!"

THE END

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